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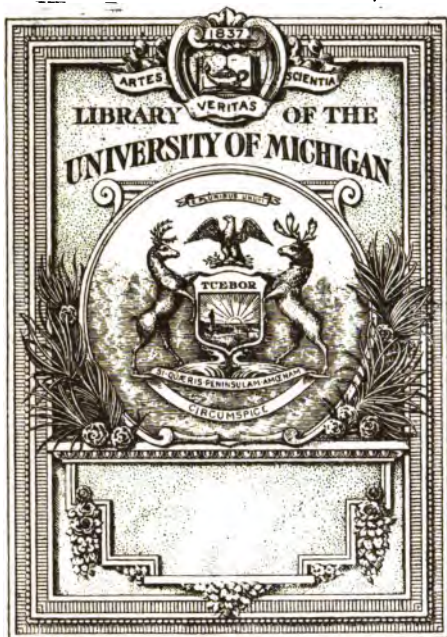
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THE GIFT OF
Mr. Wilfred Shaw

828
D5537j







L. J. DICKINSON



JOHN O' DREAMS

BY
L. J. DICKINSON :

"Yet I, a dull and muddy-
mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams."

—*Hamlet.*

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FOREWORD

SOME rhymes herein have none of the grand bow-wow to commend them to the grown-up critic. Let's hope they commend themselves to my young friends.

CH. 13



TO MY MOTHER
LUCY A. DICKINSON

YOU read my heart,
if you cannot hear
my human voice, and
you know that all I am
and do is yours. You
formed and inspired.
You were and are my
poem. So mine are yours.

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JOHN O' DREAMS

John o' Dreams

A wanderer by the wayside, I,
With a hungry heart and a dreaming eye
That sees, and not sees, the crowd pass by.

For I listen for music, elfin sweet,
Strain, lest 'tis lost by the trampling feet,
Or acclaim of triumph that fills the street.

And I never can join with the passing crowd.
I must list for my music. 'Tis not allowed
Though my heart is hungry and head is bowed.

If they find me listening yet some day
Where I let them pass on the dusty way,
They need not pity me then and say:

"He missed life for music, and life is sweet."
For I shall have risen with song-glad feet
And have followed where Music is Life complete.

Absent

(In memory of Bessie Kirtland)

The patient-faced hepatica
Watched through the April days,
And dropped in listing for her feet
Adown the shaded ways.

The robin pleaded her to peep,
He'd built his nest around.
The apple-blossoms flushed and paled
And faltered to the ground.

The Spring spread all his glories out,
But she did not behold.
For she had gone away from us
Till all the Springs are told.

Affinities

Thousands of roses
Everywhere start.
Each has its drop of dew
Hid in its heart.

World full of people
Fill mead and mart.
One there is of them all
Dear to my heart.

Aflight

The birds seek southern lands
These crispy autumn days;
A warmer glow
Calls them to go
Where summer sunshine plays.

My thoughts are like the birds;
They fly away to thee,
O'er hill and dale,
O'er wood and vale,
Wherever thou mayst be.

After the Rains

After the rains
In the country lanes,
The clover springs up
And the buttercup,
After the rains.

After the tears
And the heartsick fears,
Then melt all our troubles
And mad gladness bubbles,
After the tears.

After the Storm

All the day has been so stormy
And the tree-tops drip with rain.
Why should one harsh flash of lightning
Come to fill my heart with pain?

In the lurid light, a visage
I have known in former years
Looks upon me, white with passion,
And my pulse beats high with fears.

Go away, come not to haunt me
At the closing of the day.
With the storm-clouds and the lightning,
Go, I beg you, go away.

Afterwards

After the battle is done,
And the corpses lie stark in the sun,
Then the heart of each man is sick
After the battle is done.

After the fire has swept,
And the trunks stand all charred where it leapt,
Then the heart of the forest is sick
After the fire has swept.

After the passion has fled,
And the waste places yield up their dead,
Then the heart of hearts is sick
After the passion has fled.

All in His Image

This little, single human life of mine,
A tiny crumb let fall amid Fate's wine;
A will, defiant, independent, free;
A heart that laughs despite its agony,
That finds in every face some worthiness,
And aches for human sort to help and bless;
Bereft of all the ties that make life sweet
Yet running on life's way with willing feet—
This human life of mine. Where did it learn
That all Earth's lives are like it, all must yearn
For something vast, forever wave on wave?
Where did this midget spirit learn to crave?
Blest or bereft, the heart turns ever home;
Give less than God, the soul must seek her own.

All's Law

Men say they come not back, our dead,
A half-way truth, since they are always here.
He has one universe, our God!
And we and they, together in his hand,
Are in his world—
We go not, neither come, but stay.

I do not know their life beyond this flesh,
But this I know: His law is law,
Upon this earth, or in the milky way.
The law of right and justice deals with them as me,
The law of growth. We both are in his hand,
I and my dead. I do not understand.
It is enough, though I know not His worlds,
I know the Father's love.

Alone

I wakened in the midnight
When all about was still,
And groping through the darkness
Slipped to the window-sill.

There high above the housetops
The moon sailed red and dim,
From out the murky shadows
A faintly showing rim.

Far in the hazy distance
It wandered on alone.
I crept back to my pillow,
But all my sleep was flown.

My heart was aching for it
As there it moved afar
Across the midnight heavens
With not a single star.

Alone in the Dark

The waves swish on, and sweep,
And all but wash the mark,
And sob themselves to sleep,
All alone in the dark.

The dense black shadows creep
Across the waves. I hark
And hear the great pines weep
All alone in the dark.

But you and I are here.
You would not leave me? Hark!
My heart would stop with fear
All alone in the dark.

Apprehension

The fog is thick, and darkness steals
Upon me here.
I strain my eyes, but cannot see
The houses near.

The murky night shuts out all else,
And grows apace,
And I am chill and sick at heart
In this lone place.

And as I try in vain to see,
A nameless fear
Makes known that you are lost to me
Though now so dear.

Ashes

I stole into the room,
The hour was late,
And found but burned-out ashes
On the grate.

I crept into your life,
Near spent apart,
And found but burned-out ashes
In your heart.

Assurance of Welcome

When that last dark fight bids this body be still,
I will grasp Death's hand; I will go with a will.
As a helpless infant I entered here,
But my cry found hearts that held me dear;
And no more helpless I'll go, than then,
Where their love will receive me. So, Death, choose
when.

At Home in His Worlds

The lights of home were kindly,
Warm their glow.
Though the far corners lay in shadows there,
The not far corners of our little room,
And rooms and worlds without
Lay deep in gloom.
But that we saw not in the lamp's kind glow,
The steady light of home.
We sat close-housed together,
Happy in our love
And in the glow of home.



Lake Superior

By the Lake
Page 27





But one chill night we sat together so,
Thick clouds close pressing,
And we but nearer, since of fog and night,
Happy together in our four-walled home,
And then the lights went out,
The kindly lamps of home,
That hands had tended since our tender years.
The lights went out.
And lone left, in the dark,
The vast world's dark,
Our soul looked up and saw the midnight stars.

And after years of ache and loneliness,
Of parched throat that clutched the household name
And hurled it out in agony of prayer,
We found it was no four-walled room, our home.
It was His spaces and His omnipresences:
In microscopic systems of vast worlds
Infinitesimally small; in pages
Of old books, and books not written down
But lived by living men in busy towns;
In them of lesser sort who keep the law,
His beasts, and no communion have with us
Who will and do.

And there too in his presence
Where they're gone,
Who kindled once long since
The lights of home,
They kindle still those lights for us.
They love us and their whispers come
From His great silences
And fill our souls,
And let us know how we
Are souls as they are souls,
And in our endless life
Shall grow, through loss of dear
But lesser things,
To know, from Pisgahs painful climbed,
Our home of homes—His omnipresences.

At Set of Sun

As once you stroked my thin and silver hair
So I stroke yours, now at the set of sun.
I watch your tottering mind, its day's work done,
As once you watched with forward-looking care
My tottering feet. I love you as I should.
Stay with me. Lean on me. I'll make no sign
I was your child, and now time makes you mine.
Stay with me yet awhile at home, and do me good.

The Barren Acre

I walked in a barren garden
On a hectic autumn day.
And the leaves in the sad-eyed silence
Loosed their hold to drift away.

The garden was utterly empty,
Though 'twas watered well with tears;
Though angels folded their wings of stone
And watched through wastes of years.

But when all earth's gardens have perished,
And the sun and the moon are not,
Its flowers shall bloom forever,
Not one poor bud forgot.

Beatrice

You came along the Arno long ago—
We peer through centuries and see you there,
As first your lover saw you, tender, fair,
His soul amazed before your young youth's glow.
You saw no face heart-scarred amid the throng,
As you, a joy, made mortal, filled his view.
You passed upon your life's short way, nor knew
That moment's place in his immortal song.
He lived an exile, gnawed with pride and wrong,

A human soul that quaffed Hell's poison cup
And scornful threw them back the dregs to sup.
Of all the earth, his hate has burned most strong,
But love was his—and from Inferno rise
The dreams of Beatrice and Paradise.

Beyond the Marge

Beyond the marge I go
Where Earth and great Sky meet.
I go the trail all men have gone
With ne'er returning feet.

Beyond the marge I go
Into the land of peace,
Where seers and men of old have taught
All sins and sorrows cease.

But if 'tis I that go,
This soul of mine I've known,
For me will be such peace and calm
As I have made mine own.

Beyond the marge I go—
I do not understand—
The trail of Earth, the trail of stars,
Leads on to God's own land!

The Birthdays

I read your birthdays on a low gray stone:
The day you came to this old world of ours,
When nestlings pipped the shell and buds burst flowers
And mother eyes upon your coming shown;
The other birthday, when the clouds dripped rain
That brought young leaves and blossoms into life,
They said you died (the words cut like a knife).
We knew you lived at last, and angels blessed our pain.

Black Wing's Love

Black Wing was a Huron,
Bold of soul, a warrior
Used to blood and pillage;
Ne'er escaped his foeman,
But gave life up groaning
Stung by Black Wing's anger.

But the warrior Black Wing
Loved a half-breed maiden—
White the maiden's fancies,
Dusky red her yearning—
And her cloud-white fancies
Drifted not toward Black Wing,
Nor her dusk-red yearning.

White her misty day-dreams—
White his love and whiter;
Dusk-red her perverseness—
Still more red his longing.
Fair were White Fawn's fancies,
Matched was his affection;
And the strength of Black Wing
Matched her opposition.
Still came no betrothal.

So the tide was setting
When it chanced that Black Wing
Sped a biting arrow
From his sure-pulled bow-cord,
And the arrow found out
Not a velvet wood-deer
But a man in buckskin;
And his blood mad rushing
Through the open doorway
Left him doubly Pale-face.

Then brave Black Wing lifted
This one on his shoulders,
Bore him to the village,

Bore him to the wigwam
Of the potent Heal Wound.
Here they prayed the mighty
Manitou to heal him,
And there healing found him.
'Twas no incantation
Nor medicine man that wrought it;
'Twas the cloud-white fancies,
'Twas the dusk-red yearning
Of the lovely White Fawn
Brought the Pale-face healing.

Woe betide bold Black Wing!
Woe betide strange Pale-face!
Woe betide sweet White Fawn!
Black Wing's knife is sharpened,
And his anger sharper.
But the eyes of White Fawn,
Innocent and startled,
Search the soul of Black Wing
And no knife is sharper.
Shame in face and heart-shamed
Rushes forth the warrior
To the black-souled river,
Flings—a swirl—his black thoughts
Perish there forever.

Now, the neighboring Iroquois
Bloody were and vengeful.
Once happed Black Wing 'mong them
When a luckless Pale-face
Bound with thongs awaited
All their rage and vengeance.
Soon the flames would kiss him,
Never more would—White Fawn!
Then leaped forth the warrior
In the soul of Black Wing.

This not tortured Pale-face,
'Twas the soul of White Fawn,
E'er bowed down and speechless

Would by flames be tortured
Till her death-song floated
Upward like the smoke wraith.
And the soul of White Fawn
Was it not close knitted
To the soul of Black Wing?

"Let him go!" cried Black Wing
Leaping in among them,
"Loose his thongs and bind me,
Me a chief of Huron."

'Mong themselves they whispered:
"He hath done a kindness
To the mighty Huron.
He will pay with life-blood."

"Yea, we will unbind him."

As the blood was trickling
From his thong-bound ankles
Black Wing touched the Pale-face:
"Go, I beg thee, go thee
To the Huron village,
Go and comfort White Fawn."

The canoe was loosened—
Once it sped for Black Wing,
Now it sped for Pale-face—
Lapped the waves about it,
Lured it to the Hurons;
But his heart misgave him,
For the frightened air brought
Sound of hemlock crackling,
Sound of death-song chanted.

Fast he sped to White Fawn,
She had need of comfort!
Ah, this love was redder
Than the flames of hemlock!
Ah, this love was whiter
Than the blanching ashes!

The Blind

I met my loved one in that unknown land
Where foot of flesh goes not, nor heart of flesh,
But love can find a way. I'd often gone
To search and search in that forbidden place
Nights when my body slept. For there my soul
Turned always, sun or dark, to search for her.
And there one time I found her as she'd been,
Her kind glad face. And as she did not know
How my bold heart for hungering love of her
Forbidden bounds had crossed, I did not say,
But smiled on her, so well, who had been sick and old,
And all my soul was glad. And we stood close
And filled our hearts, death emptied, full of bliss,
That we were close and saw each other's smiles.

But one thin woman, gaunt with selfishness,
Looked slant-eyed on our love, and wished to hurt.
"Darling, all's well?" I said, "I knew it so;
God does all well; I knew you young and whole."
She smiled me, yes. Then that malignant soul
Bared skinny lips and sneered, "She yet is blind!"

I trembled, "Blind! I thought death made you whole!"

Gently her voice came, "So it does, in time.
My eyes will soon be well. I am not blind
Though, in a better way. Over here
We have small need of seeing with earth's eyes.
We see not objects merely, but the hearts of things.
You in your world are blind. You see
The body only, you cannot see the thoughts,
And mind and heart, or better might I say
Dimly as the body tries to show them forth.
But here we see, real seeing. You are blind.
I see this woman, poor and shrunk away,
Who would do evil, if your heart was small
To take it in and let the evil grow.
But your faith, whole, healthy, throws it off
And leans on, God is love and love is good.

I see her and I pity and I love.
Her poor shrunk spirit, would that it were whole!
The sick have need of us. There's work
As well as praise and peace."

"And can you see me, too, my faults as plain as hers,
And love me?"

"Yes."

"And love me spite of all?"

"Yes, more because of all."

"Then this is Heaven. It would not do to see
So on our earth, to know what each man thought,
His inmost plans. Men are not good enough.
Not mothers even, none are good enough.
'Twould take an angel so to see and so to love."

"Mayhap it would. Your human earth is blind.
But here we learn of Wisdom and of Love."

The Body to the Soul

My soul came to the windows
And glanced forth and seeing me
Did not draw back again
But stood and looked on me
In the clear light of day.

Then summoned she her messengers
And through the parted portals
Sent them forth.
Their tread was light as breath;
Their voice deep searching
As undisturbed and deathly silence;
Their message was a two-edged sword of flame.

O, soul, you need not so look on me,
Such word send.
This fleshy part shall die,
But you shall live.
And I shall willing die
That you may live.

My soul, I know that such as I
Can house not long with you.
Twixt you and me is naught in common:
You came from God
And you return;
And I, who hold you here to do my beck,
I am but fashioned earth,
My heart is clay.

Boulders

The boulder rocks
Stand gray and old and strong.
They look at the meadows
Stretched out at their feet
And do not understand.
Never the meadow's life was theirs
With lowing cattle and tree-shielded homes,
Amid the grind of every day,
Made beautiful with flowers and peace;
Never the lark sprang up
From nest that hid her store of wealth;
Or bare-footed children played
Over the deep black loam,
Chancing on treasures rare,
Gathered and straight forgot.

The boulders know not home nor tenderness.
Ever the storms beat on them,
And in centuries they grow
Less sharp, less steep, but not less strong.
Still, here and there on their bosoms
They bear one little touch of sunshine and of sky,
One little flower they tenderly fold up,
And shield, and give their stony best to.
And sometimes the opal dawns
And twilight amethysts fall on them
Like a benediction, like a peace.
For Nature knows the strength that lies in them,
And knows the wear of centuries would make a soil
From which would come a blossom if it could.

O, God, since thou hast made
A stony cliff of me,
A boulder rising in the lightning's path,
Send me the wear and tear of life,
The hardships and the work that make a soil,
That I may have my flower dream,
My fragile bloom.
I am not lava, cooled from some volcanic fire,
But only part of that bed-rock
Common to all Thy great humanity.

Brothers

I looked on sin, and felt a great disgust
Toward sinful men, they and their guilt confused.
Hereditry, environment, excused
No whit the erring sinner from God's must.
But one I loved, detected, self-confessed,
Stood foul with sin as they, sin to my hurt.
"Pure is the soul of man despite sin's dirt!"
I groaned, "This one I love." And so forgave the rest.

The Butterfly

Only a little butterfly,
With dusty, mottled wing,
Flitting about in the joyous trees;
And the sun on everything.

Only a little butterfly,
With lifeless, tattered wing,
Lying all crushed in the burning sands;
And the sun on everything.

By the Huron

I stood upon the hilltop
And caught far down below
A glint among the willows:
It was the river's flow.

The terraced slopes beyond it
Slept. Hazy blue and gray
The hot sky o'er it nodded.
I'd been a weary way.

A weather-beaten hay-barn
From an orchard peeped in view;
A plough and horses rested;
Man, I've a home like you!

By the Lake

Gray and sullen the sea,
Sullen and gray the sky.
And a sadness comes o'er me
As the panting waves lash high.

A sadness that things are so
Which is not of the sea or sky.
Though the breakers seem to know
As they strive and fail and die.

Sullen above, below,
And the foiled waves' endless roar,
As they rise for a space, and go
Like the mist on the far-off shore.

The Call of Northland Waters

The waters call me always in the Northland:
They call me as they hurry down the steep;
They beckon as they haste among their boulders;
They watch from quiet pools with eyes that weep.

Their cadence? 'Tis the luring of the Northland;
'Tis the witch spell of the cold inland sea;
'Tis why my heart leaps at wind and pine tree—
'Tis the struggling 'gainst the shackles to be free.

I have listened well, you waters in the Northland,
I have learned what the cities never see,
That the shackles that the gods would put upon us
Bind us close to Nature's heart and make us free.

Calm

The lake is tired out,
It sinks to rest,
A placid, mist-hung calm
Upon its breast.

Too wearied far to care,
Past storm-lashed strife.
Fast spent the heaving pulse,
Fast spent the life.

It lies all calm and waits
And makes no cry,
Gray with the gray of death
Beneath the sky.

The Challenge

Cold winds blow! Gray clouds lower!
You've met me in a timely hour;
For I am full of fret and fight;
My feet would wander far tonight,
Would go, and go, and know no rest;
So lead me where it seemeth best.
"Beyond man's ken?" I take the dare,
With mood defiant meet you there.
Why should I pale or turn a hair,
Or why should I white-livered stare?
I've naught to gain, and naught to lose,
So what care I what Fate may choose?
Once, though, I felt a sickening dread—
That once was when they were not dead.

Christmas

Little Babe, on Holy Night,
What makes thy mother's halo bright,
Is not what extolling angels see,
'Tis human mother love for thee.

Little Babe, on Holy Night,
No wonder star leads us aright;
What makes us bend adoring knee,
Is thou art human like as we.

Confession

Confession is good for the soul.
And she had done her confessing.
She erred, and she gave out the whole,
And her shrived soul went with its blessing.

But a hot coal burned on my lips,
It shrivelled to out, and was searing.
'Twas a coal from the burning pits,
But I held it from all men's hearing.

'Twas a thing must be left unsaid;
It would cover me black with pollution,
It would strike my fair name dead.
It was all sins held in solution.

I had trodden my soul in the dust,
And all I had hopes of possessing.
Confession is good for the soul;
But for me there can be no confessing.

A Country Cemetery

Over the hills where the heedless wind bloweth,
Over the hills where the dull cattle loweth,
Over the hills where the rumbling cart goeth,
Over the hills there is rest.

Where meadows and copper-stained heavens are
blending,
There where the dried summer grasses are bending,
There where the silence and tryst are unending,
Over the hills there is rest.

Unpained by the boor-clod that holds them in keeping,
Untouched by the shadow of hawk-wing a-sweeping,
Life's nightmare forgotten, they calmly are sleeping
Over the hills there at rest.

Covered

I've taught my lips
And they have not forgot,
They tell their lie and smile,
But it—they tell it not.

"'Tis false, 'tis false,
'Tis basely false, untrue!"
They'd swear in Heaven's ears
Till Heaven believe in you.

Cradle Song

Sleep, little babe,
To thy mother's breast folded,
Thy drowsy-weighed eyelids
Like rose petals molded.
Sleep, sleep, little babe.

Sleep, little babe,
And thy smile is befitting
For the pure in heart know
When an angel is flitting.
Sleep, sleep, little babe.

Sleep, little babe,
For One hath us in keeping,
And another babe once
With his mother lay sleeping.
Sleep, sleep, little babe.

The Crown

The first snow fell on the hills,
And the hills grew frightened gray.
For they had been used to the touch of flowers
And the golden summer day.

But the snow fell day by day,
Fell steadily, coldly down,
Till the hills uplifted their foreheads strong,
And lo, they wore a crown.

The Day is Done

The day is done, and things grow large in shadows,
And gusts of wind sweep o'er the window-pane.
The cold creeps in. The logs lie in the ashes,
And neigh'ring trees stand black and drenched
with rain.

The day is done. I wait awhile in thinking,
And gusts of pain sweep o'er my shrinking heart.
The cold creeps in. My hopes lie in the ashes.
The day is done that seemed so well at start.

Denied

(On hearing Schubert's Serenade)

I am given strength of spirit,
And talents past my due,
And all men's approbation—
My heart wants home and you.

And must I die a-hungred
For what I never knew,
And last be given Heaven,
Who wanted home and you!

Deserted

I know that it was weak to ask for comfort.
For years my heart was stout, and should have borne
One further thrust, one malice guided arrow,
But that I sudden felt me overthrown.
And what was years of training in that instant?
My heart was pierced and cried from utter pain;
Too sorely pressed, 'twas not myself that begged you
To come and help me, let your strength sustain.
Why did I turn to you? I bow confession—
It was because I thought that you alone
Would in your mantle muffle up my weakness,
And feel the sting I bore as 'twas your own.
Though dumb and crushed I've since hid in the throng,
That day I fought alone and proved me strong.

The Difference

Slow as a snail the hands crawl 'round
Upon the dial plate.
I fear if they toil on so slow
Your coming will be late.

But when you've come, and there's untold
The most we had to say,
Those same small hands, on wagers bent,
March madly on their way.

Such conduct is unkind in them.
What think you'll make them go
As swift as birds when we're apart,
And other times move slow?

The Divine Right of Kings

"The King can do no wrong."
I read it and acquiesce,
While every drop of my Puritan blood
Pulses a bounding, Yes.



"The waters call me always in the Northland"



We killed King Charles, and George the Third
Felt our bullets smart.
And the King can do no wrong?
But he is the king of my heart!

A Dream

I kissed you in a dream—
Was it dreaming? Was it true?
For my heart was mad
With joyance glad,
My heart that starved for you.

My soul forgot the worlds
Of Real and of Seem.
But my poor heart broke
When morning woke—
I had kissed you in a dream.

Easter Lilies

Prayers of Earth's bruised,
The lilies arise.
Hope in their garments,
And holiness lies;
Their fragrance, blest healing
From out of his skies.

An Easter Thought of Heaven

Heaven seems to me a gentle, homelike place
Where those I love sit often side by side
And speak of me, a smile upon their face,
Their heart with me as though they had not died.

Elfred

Elfred was young; his heart beat high,
He sought renown and true knight's glory.
She was a witch, as young in face
As old in evil, old and hoary.

I loved him well. I loved him more
Than fame or life, nor questioned whether
He loved as much. It were enough
That we were oftentimes together.

She'd pledged another one her faith.
She met Elfred; and in her kindled
A love for him, a hate for me
That grew as plighted troth-love dwindled.

She cast her evil eyes on him
And charmed him like a helpless sparrow;
And won his heart, and broke my own;
And fawned upon me on the morrow.

I met her on the blasted heath.
I strangled her who stole my lover.
The hoot-owl shrieked her passing soul.
The earth was deep I piled above her.

The Emancipated Woman

Wait, my baby, wait,
We're human in spite of fate.
Never the breath of your moistened lips,
Never the press of your finger-tips!
Never to touch you, and never to know
The thrill of your laugh and the joy of your crow!
We're human we know too late,
Wait, my baby, wait.

Wait, my baby, wait,
We're human in spite of fate.
My arms are aching to hold you fast
To a heart you could heal though the whole world
passed.
You would be the world and heaven to me,
For I'm only a woman whatever I be.
May God not say, "Too late!"
Wait, my baby, wait.

The Ensemble

A leafy path on the hillslope
Flecked with shadow and sun;
A stripe-backed chipmunk watching
Nervously ready to run;
Banks of ferns uncurling
In curves of rarest grace;
Gnarled old trees grown young again
In fairy green and lace;
Solomon's seal and bellwort,
Spring beauty, anemone,
Jack-in-the-pulpit and star-flower
And all spring's pageantry;
And the glad young bound
In the world around
Gone to the heart of me.

Evening Song

Over the hill-tops
Falls peace;
Stars o'er the tree-tops
Increase;
The sheep are returning
To rest in the hold;
Thy Shepherd doth fold,
My heart, cease thy yearning.

The Evidence of Things Not Seen

From out the black, abysmal night
A peace, an understanding and a light
Came to me at the dawn.
I knew you gone,
But waked, I knew—I knew not what I knew—
I knew the peace, the mind, the light, were you;
Beyond the reach of death you lived once more
As here with us you lived in days of yore;
You were not dead, and your great love for me
Had grown to match your immortality.

Faith

I have a faith, sure as a rock-ribbed coast:
Where all looks evil, there it trusts him most;
It would not spy his mysteries if it could;
It knows, whate'er betide, the Lord is good.

My heart stood faint when once it looked on death.
No word returned from out that awful black;
"We die, and shall we live?" came echoed back
Since first man yielded up his mortal breath.

But God came to my life. He laid his hand
Most heavily on me. Scarce could I understand.
He took my best; in place he gave to me
His gift of gifts: to know his immortality.

Fate

The continent forever stands rock-ribbed in view.
And yet my heart must falter at the ache
When to such joy thy voice might bid it wake
As all the birds are singing in the blue.
My trembling soul's a-shiver but to think
Of joyance such as that. It could not be,

'Twould be too blest for this old earth and me;
It lives in some rich East beyond life's brink.
The Cabots sought it once, and ploughed the main,
And futile searched the stern Atlantic strand
For path to where the gold Pacific lay.
And so I search life's rock-bound coast in vain,
And grope to find the way, nor understand
God made it so for me—there is no way!

Father

My father's heart, big as the human race,
Had room for men; his kindly eyes laid bare
Their proud distinctions, empty as the air,
And judged long-suffering and full of grace

Who saw God's fatherhood in every face;
His saving sense of humor understood
How good the bad, and too, how bad the good;
For his was that rare nature greatly commonplace.

Father and Mother

I could not think that they could die;
It seemed past all belief.
Yet when the one went forth alone
I scarcely sensed my grief,
But waited for the blow to fall—
I knew it, every breath,
If one should go, so must they both,
And be at one in death.

Fellowship

A line of pines on the harbor bar,
Of lone, jagged pines on a jagged bar
Where the Lake rushed through
In November storms.
It is not the heavy mass of pines
Standing close together to meet the Lake
On a hillside firm, that my eyes rest on;
No! My heart, alone in a fate-stormed world,
Turns with an ache and a fellowship
To the lone, jagged line on the jagged bar.

First Love

The golden light is kissing
The brook in glad surprise;
There is a light more tender
Which leaps into your eyes.

A bird-song from the tree-tops
Makes all the air rejoice;
But there is something sweeter
Which trembles in your voice.

The First Snow

The little clover leaves are dead,
That had so kindly grown;
And whirls of early winter snow
Are eddied round her stone.

I cannot bear that that one place
Should know your long white hours,
O, frozen cold; for in my heart
It knows but warmth and showers.

A Flirtation

She showed a row of pretty teeth
And roguish eyes of blue;
She'd caught me smiling full at her.
A silly thing to do!

She gave her head a pretty toss
And looked in scorn at me.
But I was glad. Her dimples
I do not often see.

I said, "I like your ears to flush,
That makes you pretty, lass."
But she? She only laughed at me,
My reflection in the glass.

The Flower Girl

Roses! Roses!
See my pretty roses!
Sweet they are, fresh they are,
Loveliest of posies.

Roses! Roses!
Lady, buy my roses?
The sun has set, few feet pass yet,
And the long day closes.

Roses! Roses!
"What's the price of roses?"
No food I've seen since yester e'en.
That's the price of roses.

Fogs

Some days the black fogs hang
Heavy as hangs a pall,
That covers, and covers not,
For our dread sees the stare and all—
Heavy and black and thick,
It makes our hearts grow sick!

Horrible, black the fog.
If it were only sleet
And wind and lightning stroke
To combat with hands and feet!
God spare us from fogs that crawl
And smother us with a pall.

The Footfall

It is not the foot that is passing,
It's the thousands of feet to pass.
And my eyes to meet those staring eyes
Of the ashy face in the glass.

And never in all the thousands
To hear one foot pass by.
And yet to live and to listen,
And listen—and never die!

Found

I dreamed of a flower, modest, fair,
Of gentle grace.
And since that hour I've sought it out
In every place;

In field, in bower, in mead and down;
There was no trace.
I've found my flower, at last, so fair.
It is thy face.

A Friend

Beyond the sun, into the twilight land
Let me go with you, friend,
I understand.

Your dreams are yours. A tear that dreams they be.
I would that love not I
Kept step with thee.

But since not love but I, then take my hand
As you have all my heart.
I understand.

From Whence Cometh Our Help

Let me drink the silence of the woods into my heart;
The carolling of birds, the young stream's babble.
And I will take me back into the town, and do my
part.

Let me lean down my head, where clovers lean
To look upon the earth where we shall rest us.
And I shall come away to live my life sweet breathed
and clean.

Let me wait out-of-doors till night and rain,
When old trees bow, and young limbs are a-tremble.
And I'll go back in the thoroughfares and know men's
pain.

Great, simple Nature, steal into my heart, nor leave
there space
For shouts and boasts and jostlings of the market.
An hour aside, alone with thee in silence, and these
give place.

Gaunt Gray Wolf

Old gaunt gray wolf, hie you away,
I am not afraid of you when it is day.
When it is night-time and bull-frogs croak
And screech-owls hoot from out an oak,
Then I am afraid of you, gaunt and gray.

Old gaunt gray wolf, nights if I hark
I can hear your stealthy creep in the dark,
Up from the cat-hole where dead punk glows,
Each step you take the darkness grows,
Big folks, afraid of you, then grow stark.

Old gaunt gray wolf, hie you away,
I am not afraid of you, now it is day.
This is my playtime, the lambkin leaps,
The bull-frog blinks, the screech-owl sleeps,
You are nothing but a spook, gaunt and gray.

The Gleam

I sit and think of you, darling,
As the twilight falls apace
And the last bright gleam of the setting sun
Is joyous like your face.

The God of All the Earth

God is the God of all the earth!
And the brown child He calls, "Mine,"
As he rubs the nose of an idol,
An idol as homely as sin,
And wears an amulet for a charm
Next his little heathen skin;
For He is a God whose geography
Has a rather large boundary line.

He is the God of all the earth!
And the yellow child looks good
 As he takes a lot of eatable things
 To his folks who cannot eat,
 Since they've been dead some decades,
 And it's rubbish at their feet;
But the heart of the yellow child's all right,
And so God understood.

And the black man's as good as the white man
To the God who respecteth not.
 He doesn't go in for complexion—
 Maybe He's color-blind—
 Anyway things that some folks loathe
 The good Lord doesn't mind,
Though we often think we know who's who
And could tell Him what is what.

He is the God of all the earth!
And how can a nation pray
 That God help him kill his neighbor,
 And get him out of his way,
 A civilized white neighbor,
 Who knows the Sabbath day,
And not a brown or yellow man,
But his own kind of clay.

I'm afraid we are stumbling in the dark,
So we'd better open our eyes.
When we thought our God was a Christian God
We hadn't gotten His size.
'Twas bad as the Chosen People
Who kept Him in Palestine,
And His bigness just spilled over.
No, He knows no boundary line,
No line of creed, or color,
Or form of law, or race.
For He is the God of all the earth,
And the stars are too his place!

Golden Light

Golden light, only light!
Nowhere on sea or sky,
Nowhere on earth, on high
Find I thee,
Golden light.

Golden light, only light!
Fairer than even star,
Fairer than moonlit bar,
Fairer than dawns are,
Golden light.

Golden light, only light!
Deep in my loved one's eyes
Shimm'ring the wonder lies;
Find I thee,
Golden light.

Good Death

I have not died, but Death I've known,
Clasped his hand,
Thanked him glad for mercy shown,
Begged for him to come. Alone
He could help in all the land.
Good was death to mine.

Leave the world, though far you fare,
Do not fear!
Whether here or whether there
We are always in God's care.
What we shall be shall appear.
Good is death to us.

I will hold your hand this side.
Those that wait
Know to help, for they have died,
Dread not what great death may hide.
Good has been this earthly state,
Good be death to us.

'Twill be going home for me.
So long while
Here in all humanity
Face of mine I never see
When I hear them I shall smile,
Good is death to me!

The Greatest King

Three wise men rode high on camels long ago,
And a wonder star revealed the road to keep.
They sought the greatest King the world shall know;
And they found—a darling baby fast asleep.

The Gypsy

It sprang without the palings
And shut-in garden blows,
It clambered where it wished to,
A spray of yellow rose.

She sprang without the palings.
With eyes as black as night
And small hands weaving wanton
She danced, nor knew the blight.

She spied the yellow roses
And picked them every one.
They rested o'er her little heart.
Both had a touch of sun.

The Handclasp

The little pink feet
Are curling and sweet
Snug in the clasp of mother's hand.
Sullied some day
And bleeding, must they
Walk the broad main road of grown-up land?
The strong must be so!
So baby may crow
And leap at a clasp he can not understand.

Heartache

My love is a heartache;
A rose, dust immersed,
The sun on its petals,
Dead fainting with thirst.

Thirst shrivels the rose-heart,
It withers, it dies.
A thirst dries my heart up.
O, smile with your eyes.

Heart's Desire

All the world had entered into life
In that spring season. Song of bird was rife
Mating and nesting. Buds were oping wide
To see the springtime fairness on each side
With gladly shining eyes, not knowing their own share
In all the myriad beauty everywhere.
The old earth laughed, for hope had come at dawn
Of things new born from all the waste and gone;
And human hearts felt so the stir of things
They knew it for the whirring of those wings
That watch o'er us to bring us heart's desire,
The Shall Be, yet too good, to which we aspire.

The spring and dawn fade out as fades our youth,
But in mid-season heat we learn the truth,
Ploughed lands shall yield if-deep the coulter passed
'Spite suns and drouth. His angels watch at last.
Though Death went out that glad spring morn
And smote the dewy babe but newly born,
But left the aged crones, too old for tears,
Who helpless sat by door-steps, bowed with years;
Though Death went by, and laborers laid down
Their busy tools in field and mine and town;
Though last year's harvest rotted in the field;
The last year's young fruit blighted ere the yield;

Last year our loved ones left our broken heart—
Still we that mourn may know this better part,
How some hearts waiting Here, deep-stirred, hold fast,
Our dead are of our Future, not our past.

The Heart's Elfland

Joy and a song have arisen
From childhood in my heart;
And the elfbirds sing as they listen,
And the fairy flower-bells start.

But pain and a song is my portion
Till oft from the dust I cry;
And the poor elfbirds are silent,
And the fairy flower-bells die.

He Hath Remembered His People

Scorched on the upland the fields lie brown
In the burned, mid-summer glow.
And hearts of men and women are faint
As they bend at their labor low;
Till they hear their beating human hearts
Like muffled sorrows go,
That have seen all human joys laid waste;
And the measure of human woe
Brimmed to the brim; till the human hearts
Crept in and out mid the ruined fates,
Like sad ghosts to and fro.

For human toil is endless long,
And human hopes are high.
At the scorching noontide the sorrows grow,
When all else fareth ill,
When naught but the weeds of the fates grow rank
On the ribbed and sun-baked hill.
'Tis then the toiler turns his head,
He lifts a hope-dewed eye
To the promise written overhead,

But not in the brazen sky,
The hot and brazen sky,
The promise written by God's own hand
Which no toiling can efface—
The witching spell of a baby's cry,
The marvelous hope of its face.
And the old world smiles, and the fields seem gay,
And the heavy hearts beat wild;
For God has remembered His people's toil,
And the hope of the world is the child.

Her Look of Love

I often see my mother's gentle face
Sweeter than angel's, for she was my own;
And though to heavenly beauty she has grown
I could not have that kindly look give place,
That saw my weaknesses, but felt no trace
Of lack of faith in me, and in my best
That yet would rise—and did, at her behest.
Her look of love, I'll see again; and Earth's be Heaven's grace!

Hid

I walked deep in the woods one day,
And a heart bled at my feet,
A human heart, and it wished to hide
Where none could see it beat.

A fairy man in the grasses tall
Hid the bleeding heart in leaves.
They were leaves of books and leaves of song,
And he cried, "Now none perceives!"

He clapped his hands (he meant so well),
"None will see; they will call it art."
But I saw the leaves hid not at all
The bleeding human heart.

The Hills

Two travellers met in desert wastes;
Scorched feet had walked mid dead men's bones.
"Dost know the hills?" the one made haste.
"I know." They were not words, but groans.

The hills! A thousand cattle lowed;
A cottage window watched for day.
And through the sand that burned and blowed
They walked as brothers on their way.

His Seal

He set His seal upon my face
And left me waiting in my place.
I could not flinch nor stand aside
Whate'er befell, I must abide.

At first I quailed and rent my hair
When jagged lightning tore the air.
I would have shrieked; I would have fled
From Him who rules the quick and dead.

But something mighty held me there
And steeled my weak knees strong to bear.
And last, I bow and thank the grace
That set His seal upon my face.

Home

I hope it won't be different,
I hope it won't be strange,
When I shall come to leaving here
To face that mighty change.

I don't know how that world will seem,
Nor how it all will be;
This is enough: my mother's face
Will make it a home for me.



The Song of the Birch

The House on the Milky Way

MOTHER

I'm faint. My limbs are heavy.

DAUGHTER

Yes, we'll stop.

We're on the road I called the milky way
From its white sand when I was but a child;
And this old house we know best on the road,
With barns and orchards of sweet-fruited trees,
Except the quince. It teased us with its smell,
But it was bitter. All the rest were good.
It is a kind old place. It stands here on the hillslope
Toward the sun, with hospitable doorways,
And open-faced and smiling windows.
Full of plenty 'tis, and happiness,
And natural, we've known it all our lives.

[Turning to the father.]

Wait here, and I'll run in; she can lean on you.

FATHER

[To himself.]

Yes, she can lean on me. She's leaned on me
These fifty years. Tomorrow where's our strength?
And where shall we be fifty years from now?
Sis has not thought. The young see not o'er far.

DAUGHTER

[Enters hall.]

I'll not disturb; they did not hear my knock.
I'll seat her in the parlor. She must rest.
There's plenty time to hunt our neighbor up
And tell her we were wearing out her chairs.
She'll laugh at that odd speech; she likes our jokes,
And we have known each other all our lives.
The peacock in the parlor strutting stuffed
Who strutted living, he will welcome us.

[She opens parlor door and shuts it tight suddenly, her eyes wide.]

I knocked and came right in; I had not heard,
I did not know our neighbors had one dead
And waiting burial. Strange we did not hear.
Well, she must rest. The guest-room, I'll lead there.

*[She barely opens guest-room door and shuts it
in haste.]*

I saw it out of the tail of my eye, the sweep of a sheet.
One look was enough. Our neighbors must know grief.
Well, it's a wide house. There's some place for her.

*[Door after door she opens and rushes on more
and more hurriedly.]*

It seemed a house so full of happiness,
So natural, I'd known it all my life,
But every room, the best, the meanest,
Those for state occasions, and for work,
In the maid's room, the grandmother's room,
Those for guests—in every room they are,
The sheeted dead are everywhere.
But there is one room, how could I forget,
The little room with children on the walls
In quaint, prim frames, at quainter play,
Who never run or shout, but roll their hoops
So still it made us laugh when we were small.
They always had good manners naturally,
The only natural thing about them. There
In that old play-room, how could I forget,
There she can sit her down at peace and rest.
She need not know of the sheeted dead, who lie
In every room, as she goes by the doors.
I'll peep to see if there's a chair for her,
And run and bring her up.

[She looks and shuts the door.]

I'll rush out to the porch; they're waiting there.
She shall not enter—this whole house is death.

*[She comes white-faced upon the porch, where the
two are waiting in the sunshine, the mother
leaning heavily on the father. She grasps his
sleeve and speaks low behind the mother's back.]*

What can we do?

FATHER

We can stand it!

DAUGHTER

[To herself.]

No, we cannot!

His muscles are like iron, naught can dent them;
His eyes are full of courage, full of life,
And full of light: his heart looks out of them,
And nothing can prevail against it.
As he took my fingers in his clumsy grasp,
The sunshine streamed, the door was hospitable.
I could see and bear.

FATHER

We'll lead her in.

DAUGHTER

[To herself.]

His step goes strong and sure along the halls.

[To father.]

With us supporting her, she cannot guess
Behind those fast-closed doors—

FATHER

A neighbor's house, we've known it all our lives,
With plenteous orchards, rich with kindly fruit.

DAUGHTER

But there were bitter quinces.

FATHER

And wind-falls, too, they sold for early fruit—
And so they were, too early. Queer old place,
The one we know best on your milky way.

DAUGHTER

You make it seem our world you're laughing at,
One of the stars along the milky way,
And not our neighbor's house,
Homey with old association.

FATHER

Who knows? Perhaps it is.

DAUGHTER

[*To herself.*]

How can he jest or talk in figures so,
As he is wont to do. 'Tis his Yankee blood,
Saying plain things with mighty meanings.
He turns it off, so she'll not understand,
Just he and I shall know. My heart aches so.
Why should he lead her in? It seems so wrong.
'Tis not our neighbor's house, 'tis not the place
Long years familiar as the air we breathe.
She cannot rest here in this awful house,
With sheeted dead in every room.
He leads her up steep stairs—they're hard to climb—
And chooses out a tiny little room
From all the house.

[*She looks over her mother to him as he mounts
the last step and enters.*]

Why here?

FATHER

They're all alike, the rooms. The difference
Is only we ourselves, how we can bear,
For we must bear it, and it is not new.
The house is just the same it always was.
It is not different; it is just the same,
A goodly house to dwell in, natural.
'Tis yet. The dead have been in every room
But we had not our dead and did not know.

[*He brushes the tears out of his eyes with the back
of his hand.*]

'Tis a good house.

MOTHER

Lift me up. The way was steep. I'd rest.

[*He lifts her upon a high, narrow cot to rest.*]

FATHER

'Tis natural.

DAUGHTER

Yes, yes, I bear it now.
How our neighbors' hearts have ached in their sides.

FATHER

Yes.

DAUGHTER

[After a silence.]

Perhaps 'twas wrong I sang and laughed
Sometimes when I did. Perhaps! I did not know.

FATHER

No, no, 'twas best. The neighbors need youth's joy.

DAUGHTER

And you and she knew always, knew this thing,
And yet you did not tell.

FATHER

Yes, you were young;
'Twas better so. We all know in our time.

DAUGHTER

And you both knew, you when you led her in,
She when she leaned on you. And you could bear it!
And as our hearts ache, so our neighbors' ache,
And we all sit together with our dead.

FATHER

Yes, yes, we sit so. We bear it. 'Tis natural
Here in this house along your milky way.

Hushaby

Hushaby, hushaby! Winds that are blowing,
Hushaby, sigh and sigh. Cattle are lowing.
Hushaby, hushaby,
The sunshine and summer is going.

Hushaby, hushaby! Soft shadows creeping,
Hushaby, gently lie o'er chilled grasses weeping.
Hushaby, hushaby,
This summer long some one is sleeping.

If a Man Ask for Bread

My grief was great; I leaned upon you
With heart that trusted much and felt secure.
I reached out my hands and cried, "My friend, I
suffer,"
Sure you would heed, and found I could endure.
The world might give me burdens past my bearing,
A brother's voice might curse and leave me alone,
I cried for bread; my friend, I knew, would answer.
He did. The cry was heard. He gave—a stone.

If a Man Dies Shall He Live Again

The dawnlight fell on the snow
And the snow was rosy grown.
The dawnlight fell on thee—
My poor love, the priest said so,
As he read from a book in the dark,
Said the dawnlight fell on thee—
And thou lay with thy hands crossed, silent,
And thy pale lips said not if 'twere dawning
Or if 'twere eternal night.

My tongue was parched and dumb.
Up my heart leaped and then went still
Like the waters froze to the shore
That once mad leaped and strove.

Here I stand by my mill and grind
And no tears fall on the meal.
I watch it. Dry and dusty it is,
And my throat as dust is dry.
My lips are parched and dry—
Parched for thy kisses.

And the day goes round
As the mill goes round.
The dawnlight falls on the hills
And it flushes the snow to red.
I heard Annette whisper so to a lad
As he helped her turn the wheel.
Poor little Annette, I am sorry for her
With the ribbons tied in her hair;
And he with the look in his bright black eyes,
With the smile that melts in his eyes.

Poor little Annette, she is only a child,
She has not lived. I knew her once;
She played at school with me;
We studied our Credos together,
And the priest—oh, the priest!

My love, did the dawnlight fall on thee?
Come to me out of that blackness
And tell me, art thou yet?
Art thou yet? Art thou living?
Oh, the meal falls in heaps on the pavement,
I am slack with my grinding.
I have ground here for infinite ages
And for infinite ages more I shall grind.
My love, dost thou hear
Through the measureless distance?
Canst thou hear? Canst thou heed?
My love, oh, my love, was it dawnlight
That paled thee to marble?

Oh, if I knew it were dawnlight
If I knew, I would sing at my task;
I would set my mill whirring;
I would haste, I would shout, I would laugh;
I'd outdo poor Annette there in joying;
I would joy as a bride at the kirk-bells
At the sound of my mill, if I knew,
Oh, my love, if I knew it were dawnlight.
But the air brings me back but my cry,
And the dust of my grinding.

In April

The clouds sail over the hilltops,
The sunshine sifts through the trees,
And the shadows dance and flutter
As the branches move in the breeze.

The sky is turquoise above me,
And a robin is glad hard by,
And up from the springy meadows
Comes a lambkin's bleating cry.

The buttercups smile by the roadside
For the buds are large on the trees,
And the wake-robin lifts up her beauty
From the violets 'round her knees.

And there is a smell in my nostrils
That comes from the fresh, damp earth;
And something within me is happy,
Just happy without any mirth.

There is such an exultant feeling
Fills everything under the sky;
It's enough to-day to be living,
We know it, the world and I.

The Inevitable

I come into my garden,
A hop-toad blinks on the ledge,
The flox-edged path is like powder,
The crickets drone from the hedge.

Something is gone from my garden.
The clover is crisped and brown,
The curled-up corn is dusty,
The sunflower's head hangs down.

A something is gone from my garden,
Yet the summer day is hot,
And the sun shines bright in heaven,
And the evil days are not.

We were glad at dew-fall, nor knew it,
It is born with the day begun:
No garden can hold the summer;
No heart can hold the sun.

In May

The roofs are white in the sun;
The nests of the sparrows are done.
It is May,
Hearts are gay,
For the tide of the year is begun.

The violets purple the lea;
A clover is laughing at me.
Faces show it,
Breezes blow it,
That hearts are as glad as can be.

In Morning Light

The while I sit alone in gathering shadow,
Stunned by the creeping chill and black of night,
My world of questions rolling into blackness,
They read his answers in his morning light.
Beyond the eventide, beyond the sunset,
Beyond the first star faint high in the west,
Beyond Earth's night, in God's eternal sunrise
There lies my home and those who love me best.

In the Autumn

The marshland winds a river green
Across the fields of brown;
The milkweeds by the meadow creek
Spread out their wings of down.

Like wigwams stand the shocks of corn
Bright heaps spread at their door.
The nuts fall with each gust of wind,
The squirrels seek their store.

The sumac bushes are aflame,
The hickory trees are gold,
A fading sunlight falls afield,
To-night it will be cold.

In the Morning

The day at last comes stealing o'er the hills,
And all the creeping folk begin to wake.
The wraithlike fog is lifting from the pines,
And trails its phantom garments o'er the lake.

The flower-cups have waited day to come
So long time they are heavy with the dew.
The little birds are calling to their mates.
The day has come. My heart is calling you.

In the Universal Language

A little bird sang in a wood
From out the fulness of his heart;
I listened and I understood,
'Twas such transcendent artless art.

My little brother sweetly told
His secret—'tis not mine to tell—
Which God had whispered in his ear,
Who loves His children passing well.

The Keepsakes

I treasure the little keepsakes,
And give them a tender caress;
And a love that tears my heartstrings
Smoothes the folds out of your dress.

For you have discarded the keepsakes;
And I know that I never can see
You coming with glad-faced affection,
In that dress as you used to be.

Lay of Elfwine

(Adapted from the Eddic Song)

Now when the fight was joined,
Gefids and Lombards,
Each would not yield to each,
One to the other.
Elfwine and Thurismund,
Sons of the rival kings,
Chiefs of the rival hosts,
Mightily struggled.
Thrust followed sword thrust,
Staggered the faithful horse,
Spurred the life-blood forth,
Heavily fell Thurismund.

Then when the leader fell
Melted his soldiers' hearts,
Melted his men from sight,
Vanquished in battle.
Black was the field with dead,
Black with the Lombards
Chasing the fleeing hosts
Smiting them fiercely.

When all the field was bare,
When all the dead were stripped,
Laden with spoil they went
Back to King Eadwine,
Begging that Elfwine,
Valorous victor,
Sit by his father
Comrade at table
As by his side he stood
Comrade in danger.

Then answered Eadwine them:

"There is a custom:
No prince of ours shall sit
Down with his father
Having no weapons gained
Fighting another,
Prince of another folk,
Valiant as he is."

So went young Elfwine forth,
So went forth forty,
Unto King Thuriswend,
Father of Thurismund,
King of the Gefids.
They would bring back the sword,
Their due by conquest.

When they were welcomed,
Seated at table,
And in the dead son's place
Feasted young Elfwine;
When all the servants passed
Serving at table;
Then sighed King Thuriswend,
Then broke his grief in words:
"Dear is the seat to me,
Grief he that sits therein!"

Then the king's second son
Roused by his father's wrath,
Pitched at the Lombards,
Stung them with filthy speech,
Said they were like to mares,
Mares with white stockings.
The men wore round their calves
White swathings banded.

Then cried a Lombard man:
"Go out to Asfield.
There you can plainly learn
How these same mares can kick,

There lie your brother's bones
Scattered amidst the field
Like unto wretched bones,
Bones of a pack-horse."

Then were they moved to wrath,
Then rose they for the fray.
This scoff had bitten each,
These taunts had galled them all.
Each hand was on the hilt,
Each earl had touched his sword.

Then sprang the King from meat,
Thrust in between them:
"Woe him who starts the fight!
Woe him who smites his guest!"
So they removed their swords,
Feasted with gladsome hearts,
And the King gave his guest,
Gave to Prince Elfwine,
Weapons that were his son's,
Sped him in safety.

Elfwine went back again,
Back to his father.
Sat as his guest henceforth
Eating the dainties;
Placed at his father's side,
Praised high for valor.

The Lesson

I lost a friend by death,
And then I thought I knew
The blackest grief in sorrow's school.
O, then I thought I knew.

I lost a friend. My faith
In all things good and true
He trampled on and sinned away.
O, then I knew I knew.

Life

O, Life, thou art so fair,
With sunshine in thy hair.
I'll take thee with me when I go
Out in the shadows, wearied, slow.

We'll creep out hand in hand
Into that other land,
Where I may read, without disguise
At last, the meaning in thine eyes.

Life, an Indeterminate Sentence

At best I'm but a prisoner
My past and present one,
And any day the Governor
May speak my sentence done.

But I give thee all my present
And so I give my past;
I cannot give my future
For God doth hold it fast.

And niggards are his angels
For they may dole to me
From out my thousand aeons
One present day with thee.

The Little Boy that Died

(In memory of my nephew, Mahlon Dickinson.)

The lads go wading in the creek
That wanders through the town,
To hunt where schools of minnows hide,
Their little legs tanned brown.
They know when berries should be ripe,
And where the gophers hide.
He used to know these very things,
The little boy that died.

In fall they scour the woods for nuts,
And climb the apple-trees.
They sight the rabbit in the brush
And laugh because he sees.
And then they troop along from school,
Their books swung at their side,
And shout and run. He did so once,
The little boy that died.

And as I sit and see them go,
This early winter day,
It seems another marches there
And joins them at their play.
He eager learns for coming years,
He wins the head with pride.
They will be men; but he will be
The little boy that died.

The Little Children of the Poor

Babes, who know men's labor
As they know men's sin,
Young only that their life
Did just begin.

Little Gold Curls

He stood in the sunlight, my little Gold Curls,
With a light in his laughing face,
And a jubilant note in his baby voice,
As he said with his childish grace,
That the butterflies out by the garden spring,
As they came and went in whirls,
Had told him that soon he should be a man
And not my little Gold Curls.

And then, as a shadow fell on my heart
At this news from the butterflies,
I tried to smile for I saw the clouds
Reflected in his eyes.

But his tiny arms crept round my neck,
"I will save my dresses and curls.
I will be a big man for a little while,
And then your little Gold Curls."

Time will be when my little Gold Curls will come
To that sweet-breathed garden spring,
And will vainly ask of the butterflies
With mottled and yellow wing,
Some news of the child with his curls and toys
And a heart as pure as pearls,
For they will not list to his strange, deep voice
As they did to my little Gold Curls.

The Lost Rose

Within an old-time garden
Where fairest flowers grew
I found a lovely rose-spray
Whose leaves were wet with dew.

My fingers touched it lightly,
I breathed its fragrance rare.
My hand drew back, for roses
Were growing everywhere.

And when, the morning ended,
No rose was found so sweet,
I came—too late, its petals
Were scattered at my feet.

Lullaby

Sleep, little flower, and take thy rest
Pillowed securely on mother's breast;
Angels to guard thee, and mother to love,
Dear little flower from gardens above.

Sleep, little flower, thy soft hands pressed
Close to the pain in thy mother's breast.
May they reach to soothe in the years to be
The great world's heart, as they now soothe me.



"I sit here with my river mists
 Wrapped round about me
 These hundred aeons
 And watch your human tide
 Roll at my feet."

Song of the Rocks
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Sleep, little flower, thou dost not know,
These tender feet must a man's way go.
Yet mother can bear it, for God is love,
And life shall lead to His gardens above.

So sleep, little flower, and be at rest,
Pillowed all pure on thy mother's breast.
God holds the future, and mother will love,
Sleep, little flower, from gardens above.

Made Sorrow-Wise

Compassed with darkness, heartsore for the dawn,
I stumble through this world of wilderness,
Alone. My God! I've drunk of emptiness
The stale and bitter lees, since she is gone.
But I have bought a pearl in Wisdom's mart;
Oh, that I might have learned and yet been glad—
Since Eden each of us has cried thus, mad;
I've learned the godlike greatness of the human heart.

Man and Inner Man

Aeschere is dead, the mighty warrior!
So all men held him, and they feared his face
And mailed hand that wielded battle-ax.

But this small maid of seven summers
Whose curls were toyed with once
Weeps Aeschere, the gentle father,
And this pale woman coins her heart in tears
In listing for the gravely gentle tones
To soothe her heart across the awful silence,
For Aeschere is gone, the tender loved one.

And yet that voice once brayed the battle-horn
And spit out taunts in thunder on the foeman
Till fields ran like the sword, blood hungry.
Yes, Aeschere is dead, the mighty warrior!
For so the street cries run.

But Aschere, the gentle, loving, tender,
Aeschere, the man, the streets know not.
And Aeschere is dead!

The Market-Place

The old, the gay, the alien,
The crowds of the market-place,
We human tide are brothers,
God's image in our face,
And life is sore for most of us
As we pass from place to Place.

The uncared for little children,
Predestined from the womb
For vacant eyes, or cunning,
Their fathers' sin their doom,
O, Thou, just God, remember
Their souls that dwell in gloom.

All those who are weighed and found wanting,
Whom the rough world casts aside,
Who are neither big nor good enough
To forgive and let it bide,
God, Thou art good, these unkept lives
Keep Thou in mercy wide.

There are some of the aged who wear life's crown,
Who through duty and love found Grace;
And the pure in heart who see the Good;
And the sweet babe's flower face;
Thy presence through these is still with us
And Thou walk'st in the market-place.

Marsh Weeds

Over the marshlands,
Over the waste lands,
Stretches the snow.
With its crust sun-warmed and turned to ice,
'Round the stalks of its dead weed flowers,

The pitiless sun
But warms the crust
To turn it to ice,
Shaded by cold blue silhouettes
Of the clumps of the dead weed flowers.

Desolate marsh!
It had but weeds
Out of its past.
At night the wind blows over its wastes
Snapping the stalks of its dead weed flowers.

Midwinter

The woodland stands dead silent
Knee-deep in ice and snow,
And through the shivering tree-tops
The winds of winter blow.

From out a blasted tamarack
The owl sets up his cry;
A frightened rabbit scampers
Fleet for the brush hard by.

The Miller

The giant stones grind on,
And the wheels crack as they turn,
And the heat and the dust is thick
So the eyes can not discern.

The plump young grains go in
And the crushed, blanched meal comes out.
They say that it all goes well,
For a miller is hereabout.

But we cannot see in the dust,
And the wheels make a dizzy sound,
Still there must be a God in the world
For in time the grist is ground.

Mother

My light of heaven has been a human face,
A human heart. My mother bore the trust,
And God's decrees like hers seemed meted just
Till will in me to will in her gave place;
His loving kindness was her tender grace;
She was my light of days, my childhood's must;
She was God's image kindly stamped in dust
That I might see perfection in my race.

Mother-Love

Only one nest in the apple-tree,
Only this one, seek the wide world over,
Where the sunbeams come, and the yellow bee,
And the air is sweet with the breath of clover.

Only one place where the nestlings peep,
Only this one for the little mother.
And the sight of it makes her glad heart leap
For the orchard bloom holds not such another.

Only this one. Could the birdlings know!
Only this one, they will find no other.
When the summer's done, and afar they go
They may search the world, there is but one mother.

The Mourning Dove

When passing through the woodland
I heard a mourning dove.
His voice drip-full of sorrow
Came from the trees above.

And I stood still, enchanted,
And listened to his song.
He poured forth in his moaning
What I had pent up long.

My Grandmother's Kitchen

When I'm sitting in the firelight
And the shadows wax and wane,
And am listening to the music
Of the kettle on the crane,
Hear it dreaming, hear it singing,
See the misty dreamclouds winging
Which to me old scenes are bringing
Once again,

Then I see an airy kitchen
With a polished maple floor,
With a row of milkpans blinking
In the sunshine by the door,
With the breath of clover coming,
And the sound of bees a-humming,
And the kettle cover's tumming
O'er and o'er.

And I see a sweet-faced woman
Like the pictures out of date,
With a kerchief, cap, and apron,
And a homespun gown sedate
By a latticed window bending
O'er her work. And comes unending
The low song the kettle's sending
From the grate.

And I see a crude pine table
With its homespun linen white,
And its blue-decked cups and saucers,
And its pewter polished bright.
And the iron cover flutters,
And the boiling kettle mutters,
And it gurgles, and it sputters
With delight.

And I see a group of children,
With the firelight on each face,
Curled on stools or lying careless
All about the chimney-place.

Wondrous stories they are telling,
And each little heart is welling,
And the kettle's song is swelling
 Keeping pace.

But the hazy dream-clouds vanish
And the old-time pictures go,
And the shadows 'round me deepen,
And the kettle's song is low.
And my thoughts afar are flying,
While the shadows deep are lying,
And the kettle's song is dying,
 Soft and low.

My Mother's Hands

Poor hands! So thin and worn,
But clasped in rest
Above a heart,
That could it ask one small request,
Would ask—Those meekly folded hands
In tireless love
Have toiled for me the years,
They plead above.

My Ring

My ring, my pretty ring of gold,
You shut the world out and its cold;
You shut his love in close to me,
And seal me his eternally.

My ring, my pretty ring of gold,
Two loves within your band you hold,
With one pulse beating, fettered, free,
My love for him, his love for me.

My ring, my pretty ring is gold.
His ring, my arms, I round him fold,
Content, pressed next his heart, to be
For him alone, and he for me.

The Mystery

The great stars shine in silence,
And the mystery no man knows
Breathes through the black pine masses,
And broods where the river flows.

But the earth knows not of the mystery,
Nor the great stars far and still;
'Tis my soul alone feels it everywhere
Since they lie asleep on the hill.

The Nest

It was perched in the crotch of an old apple-tree,
A nest that was staunch and as snug as could be.
It had sturdy mud walls and a lining of hair
And five pretty eggs rested cosily there.

And a plump mother robin sat long on the nest.
She felt the blue eggs hidden under her breast,
And she looked down upon me, her head on one side,
And pitied my lot, while her heart swelled with pride.

And her mate from the lilac would sing her his praise.
Oh, they were so glad in those long, sunny days.
But the skies grew all black, and the wind blew a gale,
The sleet struck their house with his gauntlet of mail.

It passed on. But five eggs lay all crushed on the
ground,
And two frightened robins were flying around.
Would that I could put back in the old apple-tree
The nest and the birdlings that were to be!

Never Mind Me

Never mind me, never mind me
If I let the hot tears blind me,
Since the hard old world has happened to say, No.
I am young and I can bear it,
You are old and should not share it;
You have known your share of trouble; let it go.

Never mind me, never mind me,
If some little sorrow find me,
This is hardest that it has to fall on you.
Let the world dole sweetmeats chary
What of that? I'll play I'm merry,
And who knows but playing still will make things true?

The New Moon

The grapes of life's wine-press are smeared over the
blue
With a touch of lost blessedness glinting through;
The good old earth with its browned, homely face,
The cattle and flocks and the neighbor's place
Are blotted out. I stand in the gray
Alone, with the moon sunk far away,
The new, new moon like a silver rim,
And the present things grow blotted dim.
'Tis mid-summer night's oppressive heat,
The great black trees, the narrow street,
The sky so big it was all that was true,
And our little household dead with you!
The struggle, the awe! It could not be—
Your pulse would come, you would stay with me.
But the new, new moon passed with your breath
And left me that night face to face with death.

Nobody Like You

The people smile in the town on me
As I am passing through.
Their nod and smile is good to see,
But—nobody smiles like you.

The people give me a kindly word,
And make a great ado
Of passing the time of day they've heard,
But—nobody speaks like you.

Such goodly words and smiles we change.
I'm sure they mean it, too,
The people seem so good. But strange—
There's nobody seems like you!

No Other Way

Up o'er the sodden hill-road
With ruts cut miry deep,
Past clumps of shapeless flowers
The black frost held in keep,
On o'er the freezing world waste
On in the dying day,
The traveler went forth alone—
There was no other way.

The chill of even chilled his blood,
The landscape blurred in night,
The west shut out its last pale glow,
And not a star gave light;
The sodden hill-road grew more steep,
But home not far away
The traveler walked brave with Death—
There was no other way!

Not in Vain

The land was life; and death was the sea:
Its slow gray waves lapped eternity.
But a few little sands thrown up on shore
Thought all for themselves was the rush and roar,
To grind them and toss them in wild rebound
Until no rest to their souls was found.
And they fretted and chafed to be puppets so
By the cruel waves tossed to and fro.
The stars crept out of abysmal night
And their calm eyes saw that all was right
Where the bar of sands by the edge of the sea
Kept back the waves of eternity.

November

Rain is on the roses,
Tears are in my eyes,
Sodden leaves lie helpless
Under weeping skies.

Mute, the wasted garden
Lifts its barren stalks;
Rain and Death are chatting
By the dripping walks.

Poor November roses,
Drenched, they fall apart.
Who can choose his season?
Be thou stilled, my heart.

The Old School Slate

I found it to-day in the attic
Where long it had lain from sight
With the dust of years upon it
And cracks from left to right.
Though it's old and cracked and dingy
What scenes it can awake,
For it brings me back my boyhood
That dingy old school slate.

There are holes where my sponge was fastened
And too, cut deep in the frame
In letters out of proportion
Boldly appears my name.
To try my new knife we cut them,
I and my seatmate Joe.
How proud I was of his carving!
Was it all years ago?

There are scratches of figures on it,
Here a six, a four, and eight.
Oh, the mass of tedious problems
Which glared once from that slate.

Here are curves of long division,
There lines and dots I see
Which speak of other puzzles
Than roots or rule of three.

And there are the faintest of traces
Of pictures drawn long ago
Of schoolmates' and teachers' faces.
That talent caused me woe,
For oft I stood in the corner,
Recess games in my pate,
Disgraced before all the pupils
My head bent o'er that slate.

And sometimes I wrote upon it
In a hand quite light for me
A name, just to see it written,
Afraid lest Joe should see.
One breath and it was lost from sight
Just as each friend and mate
Have vanished from me whom I loved
When I used that old slate.

On the Marshes

Over a rail-fence
Tumbled down,
A stretch of marsh
Scant green and brown,
Shadowed by rain-clouds passing by,
Reaches away to the lowery sky.

Only sparse herbage,
Last year's weeds,
Stunted bushes
And tangled reeds
Over the endless level ground
With low thick underbrush around.

And a lark spreads out
Its wings to fly,
It wheels and soars
Far to the sky.
Would I had wings and could fly away
From the hampering dullness of every day.

Our Parting

When people part with strangers
They smile them out of sight.
But me you kissed with vacant eyes
And lips unwholesome white.

And strangers bid each other
God speed upon the way.
But me you reached a hand grown cold
And had no word to say.

When strangers part they hope to meet,
And so, my friend, did I;
But souls close knit go silent forth
To meet not till they die.

And so I smiled, and said good-by,
And let tears have their will;
And so you stood as white as death,
And kissed me, and was still.

Peg Away

If the world is hard to meet,
Don't expect to find things sweet,
Have a smile that can't be beat,
And peg away.

If you've worked to make it go,
And blue ribbons come in slow,
Whistle loud as you can blow,
And peg away.

The Piper

"Pipe! Pipe!"
I piped and the children danced,
Their light feet tripped in glee.
Not a bird so gay
As my pipe this May,
And the children, airy free.

Their ribbon bands and hair flew wild,
Their light feet touched the lea
Like fairy things
Upborne by wings
And the magic minstrelsy.

"Pipe! Pipe!"
Their elders cried aloud,
"He pipes all grief away.
'Tis a blessed thing
For one's heart to sing.
Pipe! Pipe!"
But my heart had died that May.

The Plant

Give me a place for my roots to grow
Down through the rich, thick soil below.
Let me feel about me firm and sure
A soil that upholds me, that will endure!
I am only a poor transplanted thing
With my roots chocked up in a nursery-pot,
Give me a soil of mine own secure.

My gardener, pause in passing by!
See, my leaves and buds have found a sky;
And my roots would find them a place to hold
Firm and strong in the kindly mould.
Can I give thee bloom, and my roots unfed,
Starving for soil in this nursery-pot?
Give me soil! For my roots are my life, behold!

Playmates

To the open gates of heaven
The baby angels stray,
The golden light of setting suns
On the wing-folded little ones,
And watch upon the twilight earth
The other children play.

The little brothers of the earth
Look young-eyed at the skies,
And love the cuddling clouds of gold,
The baby angels wings unfold,
And know not that their playtime
Is lit by angels' eyes.

Pluck

The woods, as for a festival,
In gorgeous gowns are dressed.
They smile like queens. Not so they smiled
When summer-time caressed.

Men see them robed in scarlet,
In Eastern silks bedight.
But I have wept. Brave woods, I know
Your summer fled last night.

The Prodigal

The frogs are droning,
The mill-dam moaning,
The fire-flies flaunting their flickering lamp.
No star is lighted,
The sunset's blighted,
And over me falls the evening damp.

The stream is sliding
Where bats are hiding,
Now fades, now flushes a fire in camp.
Through life I've wandered,
My chances squandered,
And drag on chilled by the evening damp.

The Promise

I promised, leaving home, the world before me wide,
To know each day you loved and understood,
So looked on life and work, and found it good.
But oftentimes I cried
For you were far, and oh, the world was wide.

I promised you, when last we came to part,
I'd know your love and prayers were with me yet
No matter whitherward your feet were set
In vast eternity.
But it is vast; so it must sometimes be
I cry for you with empty, homesick heart.

The Prospector

You've heard of the Captain, straight as a string
Of body and too of heart,
Hearty and hale at seventy-six,
A pioneer from the start.
He knew Socorro, New Mexico,
'Twas his old stamping ground,
The Mogollon mountains. His mines were there,
And there his body was found.
For the call of the heart is the mountains
If once you have known them well,
The cold, bare mountains that mount to heaven,
And can be cruel as hell.

The Captain was old. He had earned his spurs.
The Governor honored his name.
He was mayor and State legislator
And regent. He'd won in the game.
He had money and honor and everything good,
But he knew where his good came from,
And when the Mogollon mountains called
He saddled Jerry and Tom,
And went to the inaccessible heights,
Just as the right man should,
With those two horses to carry his pack
And make him comrades good.

The first week out he was lucky,
And then his troubles began—
They found the notes strapped to the saddle horn.
Jerry stuck by like a man
Starving in grass a-plenty
On the heights of Turkey creek,
Where his master had perished three months before,
And his comrade. A stone loosed. Quick
Tom shot down into the canyon
And was just a broken heap.
But Jerry must wait for the Captain,
And nibble and shiver and sleep.

So they found the story how he died game
Writ out steady and clear,
With never a straggle, till the very last page
When death had come too near
For a man to quite think and write as well
As maybe a whole man should.
But the Captain looked old death in the eyes
And he fought his last fight good.
"I tried to get down into Brushy—
I tried to get out again."
That took two days. And the writing
And the meaning too was plain.

"The horses balked up the canyon,
But we made it with half a load.
Got to the top with panniers.
Went back for the bedding stowed.
Lost our trail because Tom was hungry
And crashed down the cliff with a shock.
So we cut him loose. It was pitch black night,
And we made us a bed of rock.
There were lots of rocks and bushes.
The morning would show us clear,
So we slept that night with Tom let loose
And Jerry bridled near.

"In the morning I fixed the pack up
And led Jerry up to the top.



A Road by Lake Superior

But it tuckered me out. I was famished for thirst
And so I had to stop.

"Next day I started for water,
But a precipice made me turn back.
There was grass, so I unsaddled Jerry.
And then as the night had got black
I made me a fire and rested.
The horse had been right sure enough
When he'd tried to go back. For we'd slept out
Within twenty yards of our stuff.

"I woke up next day all used up.
I tried but I couldn't eat bread.
I got some sugar and tried it,
Then sucked some tablets instead.
I'll try to put the saddle on Jerry,
And get back to the trail somewhere near.
We must find our way down to get water,
I'd hate to have him left here.
We'll put in to-night on the mountains—
Six days we have been without drink—
In the morning we'll start for the water.
God be with me! You scarcely would think
How I shouted to-day half my voice out,
'Help! help!' But my throat's pretty dry—
In some camp I smelt fresh meat on cooking,
The smell came—but not a reply.

"The next day I got down—'twasn't easy—
And went crash right into a pool.
It started to rain. It kept at it
Two days and two nights. It grew cool.
No place for a bed, and wet matches
So no fire. Cold and wet to the core.
Heard the bell where Jerry was hobbled
The first night. But hear it no more.
I'll try to get out in the morning.
They're the worst, these two days and nights.

"Well, it's morning. The sun is let in.
I feel better—"

He writes
Just that much and no further—
He got out the same as he tried,
For he heeded the call of the mountains,
And there in the mountains he died.

The Public School Teacher

The city's arc-lights are companions;
They shine from the dark outside,
And show where gather home-circles
So happy, far and wide.

Save for them I'm alone in my bedroom
And the silence seems a din
Of phantom voices calling
Who have been or should be my kin.

Sweet voices, I hear you calling,
But can you not understand
That my woman's heart you are breaking
Finds her children in this land?

Most of my children are aliens,
Most of them shy and poor,
With hearts that beat high with ambition
And courage stout to endure.

And some one must love these children
In the circles far and wide,
Must give them the heart of a woman,
Not alien and not untried.

For they must grow up to men's stature
In this country that needs their best.
So voices, I beg you be silent,
My children will call me blest.

The Question

A bitter day,
Cold and gray,
With madcap wind
That whips the bay,
And lashes the foam.
Is it too a heart, barred out from home
In the depths of lake,
Driven hither and yon on this world of bay
On its harried, uncertain, wreck-strewn way,
When to me, as I see it reach and crawl,
Licking its lips on the seaward wall,
It seems the vampire demon of all?
There are humans so like it—
Who can say?

The Recompense

Why made Thou me immortal? In my pain
One only boon I ask, oblivion!
The shackles of my immortality,
O God, remove. Let me lie down and die.
But calmed by night and stars; by this clear mind
That thinks great thoughts for me and shows me Good;
Though bowed with pain, and faint with emptiness,
Yet would I thank thee for this deathless boon.
For I have been, and am, and yet shall be,
And courage have to go my endless way,
Nor weakly ask release. I run the risk
Of godlike pain to think these godlike thoughts.
For what is pain if I may find out Truth?

Remembered

I found a fair shell on the sandy shore
Where 'twas left by the ebbing sea.
I took it away from the ocean's roar,
And carried it home with me.

The shell though had hidden within its heart
What it heard where the breakers swell.
It murmurs this still, though so far apart,
This song that it loves so well.

Reported Missing

Eternal Father, hast Thou taken him
And does he wait for me in Paradise,
The old dear welcome in his hearty hand,
The glad beam in his eyes?

He comes to me at morning and at noon,
And evenings when I bend me o'er the Book
The tears fall down upon the swimming page
Before that old-time look.

Dear one, where art thou?
I would find thee
In all this world of change,
Bloody with carnage;
In all the heavens,
Deafened with shrapnel
Deafened to supplication,
There would my spirit range;
Speak where thou art.

Tell me what happened,
O, what did befall thee?
Silent, my sobs!
You drown if voice there be.
Listen, the worst would still be healing.
Was it worse, or worse, or worse uncertainty?

Baffled I sit.
My heart, there is no answer.
But love is infinite
And love will find him.
When burst from mortal bands
Then love will touch him with her wings and whisper:

"Through all the long uncertainty I suffered,
I ached for thee, and oft were lashes wet.
My life was all a prayer,
At last, full answered
In finding thee, and knowing all—at last."

Perhaps the enemy will give him succor,
For he made ready friends in days long flown—
I have drained with you all your cup of anguish
Whate'er it was. I did not leave you lone.—

Mind lost and wand'ring?—I am still your mourner,
I bury you afresh with each new day—
Perhaps some news will come; he may be living.
Perhaps his love at last will find a way.—

If thou had'st died, then I had bowed me meekly,
My grief made calm by thy sweet paradise.
But now—tell me where art thou, what befallst,
Tell me—my brain is dazed, my reason flies.

God, Thou art good! I beg Thee,
Did'st Thou note the sparrow's fall,
My sparrow's fall!

Resolve

I have not tried
And so I have not failed;
But better were it
To have tried and failed.
To have gone down upon the battle-field
With blood warm gushing from my side,
The smell of it in my face,
Than thus whole-limbed to stand
and not have tried.

But I will try,
I will not meekly yield,
I'll from the front
With dents upon my shield.
If I but wrest defeat, no voice shall scoff:
"A lady's chamber sort of knight,"
The truth of it in my blush,
My vanquishment costs dear,
for I will try.

The Robin's Question

A robin came over the grass,
Alit with the dying day;
The spring had come,
The rain was done,
And his heart was glad with May.
Why should one stand so mute?
He stopped and a wonder gave.
The spring had come,
The rain was done.
But I stood by a new-made grave.

The Robin's Song

The robin has a song to sing,
A merry song.
And though the blust'ring days of March
Are very long,
He sturdy sits with folded wing
Upon the bough,
And reasserts, "It will be spring
Before long now!"

The Rockies

Through wasted habitations,
Iron shod,
The sons of men have found thee.
Hills of God!

And eyes, beholding once,
Forget the clod,
And steadfast fix upon thee,
Hills of God!

And hearts that stay on thee
As on a rod,
Cry out: "Our help ariseth,
Hills of God!"

Romance

I love him so well I am happy,
Robin, atilt on the bough,
You wove the tale into the measures
Swelling your bosom just now.

I love him so well, pretty blossoms,
Lavishing bloom on the tree,
The glory-crown of the gnarled orchard—
Just that his love is to me.

I love him so well I am happy,
Dainty clouds floating above;
You are gladsome and light in the sunshine,
So is my heart in his love.

Sated

O, little morning line of pines
Against a silver sky,
Yourselves a blinding, silver mist,
Why should we pass you by,
But that at dawn so much is fair
We never question why.

At even you're in ragged black
Against an eastern gray
That catches up a purple tinge
From the blood-red set of day;
But we've seen so much of ragged black
We turn our eyes away.

The Scar

The scar in my heart has grown together;
It once was an ugly wound,
With jagged edges. I thought it never
Could heal over well and sound.

But I carry the scar. All men may see it:
The curious question why;
The scarred look away, blind, mute, albeit
They forget not their own—nor I.

The Setting Star

The star and the moon went down the sky
In the rayless dark where all things die,
And I watched how calmly their way they went
Their steep dark course in the firmament.
I had looked on death. It had entered my soul.
It had left its hurt. But the star shone so
I knew what mortal scarce dare to know,
How His star on 'its aeon course could roll,
And I could go forth and possess my soul.

Soldiers All

I stood beside my mother's door
To watch the troops march by,
And gaily waved my hand at him
Because I would not cry.

He had to go. His heart was lead,
He scarcely raised his eye.
And so I waved and Bruno barked—
It had been worse to cry.

The news has come: the fight is ours,
But few men had to die.
And Bruno mutely looks at me—
What good were it to cry!

The Song of the Birch

The song of the birch!
Its delicate leaves,
Its delicate dreamings;
Its fair maiden form,
Its pure maiden fancies;
Its finger-tips white
Caressing the breezes.
'Tis lisping its secret,
The song of the birch.

"Pure white I stand
With the dark firs around me.
Light on the sand,
Light on the sea,
Light on the sky,
But no light for me.

"Here close beside me
Grows a dark fir tree.
Vibrant his needles
Are sighing; and she,
A graceful, young balsam,
Is deaf to his pleadings.
The fir and the balsam
I weep, and their pain.
Why loved Wemotongwah
The brave not again!

"Gay as a bird
Singing at dawn,
Gay as a boat
Skimming the water;
Child of a chief,
Loved of a brave,
Fair Wemotongwah!

"There sped in a boat
From far o'er the water
A white man with love
For the fair Wemotongwah.

And she gave her heart
Lest he fade on denial
Like the wraith in the fall
Of the quenched forest fires.

"Hand clasped in hand,
Eyes reading eyes,
The lovers would stand
For hours in my shadow.
Fair as myself
Were the hearts of the lovers.
He was a man
With a face pale as mine,
With forehead as white
And fancies as fair.
Fair as myself
The pure-hearted stranger;
Dark as the firs
The shy Wemotongwah.

"But the chief
Loved the brave,
Loved the dark, moaning fir tree.
Gave ear to his plaint;
Gave word to the birch,
Who loved Wemotongwah:
 'Get thee hence
 Or taste death!
 May the Manitou curse thee,
 Thou treacherous pale-face,
 Thou fawner, betrayer,
 Thou robber of red men!
 The fawn of our forest
 Thou draggest away
 With evil enchantments,
 The fawn of our forest
 That slept in my bosom.
 Get thee hence
 Ere I slay!
 The child of my body,

The son of my choosing,
Wilt thou wrong and destroy?
May the Manitou curse thee,
The Manitou mighty,
The God of the red men!
His bow-cord draw on thee,
His sharp arrows bite thee,
His hand be against thee,
His mighty heart curse!
Thou robber of red men,
The Manitou curse thee!
Get thee hence
To thy death!"

"Ah, the chief
Loved the brave,
Loved the dark, moaning fir tree.
Gave ear to his plaint
Gave fair Wemotongwah
In promise to him,
When her soul
Clave in love
To the pure-hearted stranger.

"Then they stood here by me,
The man and the maid,
The birch and the fir tree,
They stood here by me—
Ah! how can I tell it?
Their death-song they chanted—
No light on the sea!

"Dead, dead!
Gray and cold the waves,
Ashen gray the driftwood
On the shore.
Gray the froth that laves
And cold the cry,
'No more! No more!"

"Dead, dead!
Glad were human hearts,
Frighted gray were waves that
Closed them o'er.
Gray the death-song starts
From breasts long cold,
'No more! No more!"

"Ah, shy Wemotongwah,
The Manitou heard thee.
His heart turned with grace
To the pure-hearted lover;
His heart turned with love
To the race of the stranger.

"The fir trees are fallen,
The birches are standing
Alone and encompassed
By pitiless waste.
The white men have risen—
The Manitou leads them—
The red men have perished.
Who knoweth their place?

The braves are departed,
The chief and the council,
The wigwams are empty,
The campfires are white.
The trails are deserted,
The strong bows are rotted,
The red men forgotten
Like dreams of the night.

"The wild folk have hidden,
The frightened game scattered,
The fowl flown afar;
The young ferns and wild-flowers
Are torn by the ploughshare;
The great waves have bowed them;
The stranger race sways.

"The Manitou wills it!
The fir trees are fallen,
The birches are standing;
Men fade at his bidding,
The Manitou bides."

Song of the Rocks

Poor human thing!
You have so short a space to live!
I sit here with my river mists
Wrapped round about me
These hundred aeons
And watch your human tide
Roll at my feet.
Poor human thing!

You laugh and gayly go your way
Along the sands
For just your little hour.
And I—I sit and think
A countless age;
No gladness leaps within mine eyes,
For well I know
That life is short
And solemn as all time,
Poor human thing!

A Son's Pledge

I feel myself honored to bear the name
Of honest men as my heritage;
I give you my word to keep it from blame
And pass it clean to the coming age.

Sorrow

Dame Sorrow sat at home with me,
A gruesome spectre at my side,
And clutched my bone with clammy claws,
And glared with dead eyes petrified.

I fled daft Sorrow to the throng.
My eyeballs smarted, strained to see,
But sight was holden. For there were
The eyes of Sorrow fixed on me.

The throng was not. I turned my steps,
Breathed hot behind her stifling breath,
I swung the door to let her in,
And cold as ashes, housed with Death.

The Soul Set Free

There is blood on my hands, and its scent in my face.
Take it from me! I faint. Back, I pray you, give
place!

Oh! I see your fangs, and your fetid breath
Has a stench like my hands. Back, I cry you, Death!

I stumble, I grope. Let me feel about.
Can a man walk sure when the lights are out?

But the lights *are* out. Do you tell me? Hark!
No lights forever, aye naught but dark?

And me to grope through black palled lands,
With always the stench of blood on my hands?

And what have I done? Great God! I shall scream.
There is blood, and the stench. Let me know it a
dream.

What are men I should care for their blood and their
cries?
Take the stench from my nostrils, the pall from my
eyes!

And the blood? What mean you? "Your hands are
white.
The stench is your own. Look! You're bathed in
light."

I shall scream till I snap the strings of my voice.
Stop that madness of Heaven made Hell by my choice.

Great God! Though I rave shall I never be free?
Then this horror is Heaven? This Hell it is me?

This Hell it is me, and the All-Pure has seen
Me as filthy as spew, who thought myself clean.

It is me. O, Creator, I grovel, I cry,
I have waked to my rot. Let me die, let me die.

Stars in the Dark

We cannot look upon his face and live;
We sit in darkness; we are mortal men.
But life and death grasp hold us, now and then,
And make us know what one time he shall give.

Beyond the bounded walls of this mean room
I look into the silence of the night
Where God's great stars shine luminously bright.
I look and know. I am not left in gloom.
The deathlike dark from silences of space
Crept to our heart and made us sore afraid.
But God remembered us his hand had made
And stars came crowding, till the dark gave place.

We loved each other, and you fell on sleep.
My love yearns to you glad, so hurt below,
And feels—your love! He gives my soul to know,
His dead shall live,—the depths of Love are deep!

A Sugar Snow

Tweet and tweet!
Tweet and tweet!
Snow and slush is on the street,
Slush and snow, snow and sleet.
Spring is winter.
Tweet and tweet.

Cheer-e-o!
Cheer-e-o!
This is just a sugar snow.
Snows like these make full saps flow.
Saps make sugar.
Cheer-e-o!

Summer is Over

The reapers are gone from the hills,
The cows stalk by with the drover,
The crickets are singing at noon,
And summer is over.

The birds are leaving the woods,
Brown is the buckwheat and clover,
A golden haze lies over all,
And summer is over.

And I stand alone in the fields,
I who have been but a rover,
And dream of the golden days,
Now summer is over!

Sunday Morn

That Sunday morn when you arose and went
Out toward the Dawn, and left behind the dark,
And dew-weighed buds, and birds that stopped to
hark,
Your face alight with measureless content,
A benediction fell on us, release
From earth, that made us know in part
What you knew face to Face, and heart to Heart,
For God had passed that way and left His holy peace.

Sympathy

The night is full of blackness
With scarce the faintest star,
And here and there a houselight
Shows dimly from afar.



"In the deep of Northland winter"



A heavy mist is settling,
A mist as thick as rain,
There's something in this darkness
That is akin to pain.

And in your eyes this morning
I saw the shadows lie;
This darkness seems so like it,
And yet I know not why.

A Tale of Clover

A flush spread itself o'er the cheek of the clover.
"You want to take care," said the breeze passing over.
"You're too fragrant a thing.
There's a bee on the wing.
You beware! You take care! For I know; I'm a
rover."

The bee whispered low, "He is years and years older;
We are young; you are sweet." Then he droned,
growing bolder
As she hung her fair head,
"You're so sweet that I sped
To be near, to be here." And she drank all he told
her!

There Shall be Light

(When three of my boys were taken, Hugh Mills,
James Calhoun, Ralph French.)

Learners are we together in Earth's schoolroom,
My boys and girls, no teacher there am I.
The problems life and death have set before us
I face, as you, with but an aching, Why:
Bricks without straw; the bruised reeds roughly
broken;
The laborers gone, and fields with harvest white.
But this I know: when we reach Heaven's stature
Our eyes shall see how everything was right.

Three Poems

The spring was touched by death,
All the green, all the sheen,
All the sunshine and young flowers,
All the evanescent bloom of practical fruit-trees,
The pink mist of useful peach sprouts,
All was dead.

The sun fell to glare, to kill the sight, and blind—
Not to warm.
It fell upon a leveled gravel length
On the trampled green sod,
The dead gravel length of one dead.

And so since her life went out, who gave me life—
How could her life go out who had life to give to me?
And I powerless to lend her one least minute
Of my empty years to come!
So, since her life went out, the spring went out;
And hope, and all the world went out for me.

Unto my farthest days my eyes shall see
The waving of that pink bough of apricot
Lifted by the warm spring air above her,
She in the darkness of death,
The flowers in the sun.
I liked to feel so little much of sun
Touched that that rested o'er her silence.

I could not go with her.
She had gone all the cold regal way of death alone.
Nor signified that I might come.
I waited on in some lorn anteroom
For no one brought me word
This majesty would see me,
And I, a poor dumb slave,
Knew not their stately ways
In dread imperial palaces—
I knew only my rudely human home,
Where this cold majesty, who spoke no word to me,

Had been my mother's bosom,
Her arms about me, and her lips to my tear-wet cheeks,
Soothing my so small griefs
That my dead heart smiled at them,
Babes of a petty kingdom, himself
Transfigured kingly like her majesty.

And then 'twould serge o'er me
That this cold palace and imperial majesty
That spoke no word, nor gave no sign to me,
Was nothing, as my nervous, twisting hands were
nothing,

And my dead heart, and all my fleshy self.
The only real things
In this universe of quick and dead,
Quick bodies and dead corpses,
Were not these same things, bodies, quick or dead,
But only she and I, my mother and myself,
And our great love—our love
That loved in life, and loved in death,
And knew nor life nor death, but only love.

And then I bowed my lips and touched
The velvet hap that mantled her about,
With lips of blessings.

To a Dog

Old dog, with the kind brown eyes,
Have you a soul? How do you live?
What do you know of life and death?
And duty? For you do yours!
I do not know!
I ask, but you cannot tell.
A gulf is fixed which we cannot cross
To talk about these things
Together, God's creatures, you and I.
But one thing you tell, so I know you know,
And you know that I know it too.
We know one thing together
We can speak of to each other—
Love! Old dog, with the kind brown eyes.

To Each His Burden

I loved you so!
But I could not keep
Your lips from kissing pain:
You toiled deep in the valley,
You wandered in the rain,
You knew life's ache and labor—
You died as did our neighbor—
And I, who loved you so,
Could only see you stumble—
Could only see you die.
And O, I loved you so!

To Mother on My Birthday

This was the day your dear eyes shone
On a mite of humanity all your own.
And I'm thankful today and my whole life through
For your gift of life, and God's gift of you.

To Mozart

Once a bird which had winged from summer-time
Was far in the north away,
But he merrily sang mid the frost and rime
A happy roundelay.

And he cheered all hearts with his merry rhyme
Of sunshine like strands of gold.
And he sang till the love of the summer-time
Was known in northlands cold.

But the heart of the bird was choked with pain,
He loved not the frost and rime.
But he sang his loved song o'er and o'er again,
The song of summer-time.

To Mr. Merryman

It was a little woodland plant
That blossomed from the mould,
When every springtime bush was white
And hillsides were pure gold.
To a heart that loved the woodland things
Did that little plant unfold.

A little bird in winter sang
Amid the deep white cold
Some straggling, shy, untutored notes,
Which no poet's verses hold.
To a heart that loved the woodland things
Was the crude bird's story told.

Will plant and bird, the woodland things,
Know that their friend is gone?
And will they know of death the things
We humans ponder on?
Or will they see with truer eyes
That heart and Nature one?

For his feet have found the lonesome trail
Where all great souls have trod,
That leads from out our woodland ways
To those high fields of God,
Where he may learn the psalm of life
From star choir and from clod.

All flowers shall bloom, all birds shall sing,
And God shall hear each one;
And their friend shall listen close to Him
From those fields where he is gone,
Till his heart shall grow to abounding love
So he may serve at Dawn.

Too Plain

There are secrets the gods would utter,
So they whisper them wide as the race;
And we stand appalled with a hush in our heart,
And a wonder in our face.

We know that the language is mighty;
We would learn it with infinite pain
This hymn of the gods. But we lose it—
Too simple it is, and plain.

The Tool

Some gray boats boom as they feel their way
Through the fog this morning to harbor or lake.
Last night was cold,
And the lake feels old
For the lives it had to take.
For the lake is like the rest of us
A tool in the hands of fate.

The Tree

O, giant tree within the wood,
When I was a child you'd stood here long.
I lean against you and I feel
A something in you big and strong.

Have you not seen buds ope to die,
And slim young trees half-grown that fell,
No fault of theirs the blight or worm
Or lightning stroke? Yet, all is well?
Have you not seen the fledglings dead
When first they tried a flight or song?
'Twas not their fault they perished so.
Where lies the right of all this wrong?
Among my brothers I have seen
What you have known here in this wood,
And I have cried aloud to Heaven,
While clothed upon with calm you stood,
Obeying the law of blight or growth.
I would be strong, too, if I could.

Old tree, for you are full of years,
What wisdom have you that I need,
That gives you iron-hearted strength?
What perfect-balanced-justice creed?

I waited long. I pressed my arms
About the old tree's rugged bark.
It seemed its life pulse reached to mine,
It surged a chant in minor. Hark!

"I waited in sunshine,
I waited in midnight,
I waited to know.
The stars looked upon me,
Young life bloomed about me,
Death's mystery touched me—
Yet why was it so?
I waited to know.

"Then deep through the stillness
Whence time is unscrolled,
A silence fell on me,
That strook on my heart-strings
And Sinii-like rolled:

"Be still and know that I am God,
I am the great I Am,
Be still and know.
Sunshine and winter midnight,
Life and death—and death shall make you know
That God is love.
Ye shall be strong and grow,
The Earth be yours,
The stars, eternity,
For God is love,
The one great God is love!"

"And there in the hush
Of perfected creation,
With Him passing through,
My soul bowed in silence,
And stilled. I knew."

The Two Workers

The old man worked with the spade,
The young man worked with the pen;
The old man conquered the glebe,
The young man conquered men.

The old man's face was glad
With the dawn-light from on high;
The young man's eyes were dulled
With fogs that blurred the sky.

For the harrowed glebe will bud;
But he who works with men
Must know that man with his will
Mars even the great God's plan.

Unchanged

A thought slipped out of my heart,
Just a human thought, I know,
But you were so tenderly human
When you lived with us below.

My heart comes near to breaking
In this empty Time and Space;
Can it be you sometimes are homesick
To look upon my face?

Understood

Out toward the hills of morning
Her certain feet have trod.
I cannot sense her vision
From those high hills of God.

But she has walked my valley,
And she can understand
Her child's poor human stumbling
On through a weary land.

Uninterpreted

The life of man is a mystery,
Transcending caste or place,
Writ large on the common human heart
And the God-stamped human face.

Our prophets, our poets, our mothers,
Alone since the world began,
Have caught some words of the mystic rune,
Writ down in the heart of man.

But we cannot interpret the mystic word,
Though we know we are a part,
For His thoughts are beyond our thinking
Who wrote on the human heart.

The Veil

Far in the shadow helm a spirit went,
Heavy of foot and heavier of heart,
A summoned culprit forth to meet the judge.
He stood at length amid a blaze of light
Before the mighty god that reads men's souls.
He dared not lift his eye, his frightened heart
Tugged neath the veil that wrapped him fold on fold
In ample garments of apology.

When would that voice command and all his veil
Fall from him at a breath and leave him bare?
And what would hold him if his joints gave way
And he fell prone, who had but meant to clutch
One last small shred above his heart and cry,
"Be merciful! I am but human!"

Yet since he could not scape, and he who stands confessed
Best stand condemned, he lifted up his gaze.
The great god steadfast looked, while yearning love
And sadness swept his face. "Son, keep your veil.
I have no need of disillusionment,

For I have seen men ever as they are.
I knew their guilt, but even 'ere they sinned
I knew the tempering apology.
Ah, now you cast it forth, will none of it.
Then keep it yet, my son, I gave it you."

The Vigil

I am waiting my brave to come.
He went away on the track,
And the storm and the sleet came on,
And he has not yet come back.

It was winter and bitterly cold,
I was so hungry I cried.
So he went away to hunt,
With his bow swung at his side.

I listened for him in my dreams,
For the coming of his feet,
Till the bumble-bee roamed afield,
And the clover heads hung sweet.

I waited as trees grew gold,
And maize was hard in the ear;
Waited till fields turned brown,
And the first snow-flake was here.

I have waited so long, so long,
That the lake lies frozen and stark,
And the pines, in the chilling wind,
Wail as they sway in the dark.

And sometimes now in the night,
When the wind and the moon are out,
I see his shadow fall on the snow,
And hear his foot about.

I creep from my bed to the door,
But the shadow glides from sight
Down to the forest's edge.
Our ghosts shall meet some night!

Violets

The white clouds go
Where the young breezes blow,
And the tender blades shiver at my feet;
And the violets wither. Blue and sweet,
They withered long ago.

All my dreams were true
When violets were blue;
And my heart followed whither dreams had led.
But the violets wither. They are dead;
They withered long ago.

It must be so!
So let the wild gales blow,
And the rushing current quiver in the night,
And the violets wither. My delight
Has withered long ago.

The Voice of Many

A sound of human sorrow comes to me,
My sisters' voices in adversity:
A rush of street slang, empty, hiding well;
A laugh as void of joy as church of bell,
A hard bravado, hollow, free of mirth,
That mocks perchance such hell can be on earth,
Or jeers at warned of horrors that shall be
When here one has endured such tragedy.

The voices know not that they cry to me,
The saddest cry in all humanity,
The cry of those oppressed by custom's law,
Since "men must sin," who fill lust's hungry maw.

Wait Upon the Lord

Wait upon the Lord!
Grow strong within His presence!
Thy years are in His hand.
Draw close and understand
His ways, not thy ways;
These things thine eyes demand
Are of the Earth, His footstool.

Lift up thine heart! Abide!
Yearnings thy soul doth hide,
Caused He aforetime,
Thou shalt be satisfied,
For He is God, Almighty.
O, wait upon the Lord!
Grow strong within His presence!

The Water-Wheel

The mill is near the portage,
Once more I hear the sound
Of cold spring water dripping
As slow the wheel goes round.

The ledges, cool and moss-grown,
Reach outward near the sweep.
There shadows gather thickest
And there the pool is deep.

The pond is dank with frogsbit,
Its stagnant waters doze;
But here the waters drip and drip,
Portentous shadows close.

Here where for generations
The farmers' grists were ground
E'en in this country stillness
The wheel of Fate drips round.

The Way

It used to lie beyond the year
Of busy days of work in school,
A forward beckoning hope for me,
The way to you.

And now it lies beyond the years,
The year on year of work in life,
A forward beckoning hope for me,
The way to you.

A Wayfarer

Over the highway to you this morning,
The long-traveled highway to you.
These pains are the ruts, this faintness the dust,
This numbness, the crust of the slough.
But I shall press on, till my body is left,
And my soul finds itself and you.

Weary

I'd like to stretch in clover bloom
And hear the woodlark's treble,
Or watch the millpond's gossips spread
How I threw in a pebble.

I'd hear the twilight whip-poor-will
And full contented cricket;
And watch the moon's big bonfire glow
Beyond the hazel thicket.

I'd hear the rockers on the floor,
The crooning, "Sleep, my dearie,"
I'd like to be at home and rest;
For the world is wide and weary.

Were I a Rose

Were I a rose,
I would be pressed
Upon a little waxen breast,
And, angel-guarded, droop to rest,
And so depart.

Were I a rose,
I'd count it good
To catch the tear of motherhood,
And bear it safely home to God
Held in my heart.

When Day is Dead

The day is dead, the light is fled,
The sun's at rest.
'Tis twilight deep, long shadows creep
Across the west.

One lone faint star glows from afar;
The night-birds cry.
The deep shades grow, vague outlines show
Against the sky.

Each sound is hushed. Where crimson flushed
The sunset skies,
There on the night a tinge of light
In pity lies.

When day is dead, the joy is fled
Of other years,
Sweet memories rise before our eyes
Half blind with tears.

The Wife

The oxen are home,
They are free from the neckyoke;
The frogs greet the gloom
So incessant it crazes;
The cattle are resting,
They eat in the stall;
When my day's work is ended
I rest not at all.

For William comes in,
And the lamps, they are lighted;
And a gleam like a sin
Falls upon me and crushes
For William is William—
It may be the light—
And he too is another.
It gives me a fright!

I clutch to the ring,
To the gold ring he gave me.
'Tis an unholy thing,
May my bitter tears shrive me—
For William is husband
Before God and men,
I am his, I have pledged it.
But God knows! What then!

God knows 'tis a lie.
In the long hours of moonlight
I start with a cry,
For he lies there so silent
That my flesh creeps with terror,
He seems like the dead.
Is the midnight turned judgment?
What's that I have said?

For William had lands
And bank-notes a-plenty.
The church blessed the bands,
And I'm sure I consented.
No wife is more faithful,
And he does not know.
My parents had willed it.
Oh! I told Bob to go.

For William had lands
And bank-notes a-plenty;
And Bob had his hands
And his love—Gracious Heaven!
And I swore to forget it—
I know I'm a wife—
But my dreams will remember.
His love is my life!

I've not seen his face;
He is gone, says the village.
And I—God have grace—
I have paid William's kisses,

I wear his gold ring.
But when life wears me out
Take it dead from my fingers.
It would cry my soul false
When I stand 'fore the King.

The Wife of Waibingen

A watchman lived in Waibingen
Within an ancient tower;
His clock and he watched years go by
The while they told the hour.

Each day he climbed the narrow stairs,
Cramped in their walls of stone,
His dulled heart said, "It is not good
For man to be alone."

So he a buxom maiden brought,
Who climbed the stairs with him,
And ne'er went down to gad about
But kept the tower trim.

So years went by in Waibingen
As years are sure to go,
Till he grew old, and climbed the stairs
With heavy step and slow.

She would have climbed the narrow stairs
Cramped in their walls of stone,
And helped her husband, but could not—
She'd too prodigious grown.

So when fate's horologe for him
Struck out life's passing hour,
He left her where she long had been
Safe seated in the tower.

Now, when we die, the world goes on;
Men step into our shoes,
And get more than they bargained for;
Perhaps we gain, they lose.



"The sentinels on the shore"

The Wreck of the Benjamin Noble
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Howe'er that is, I do not know,
'Tis neither here nor there;
A watchman came to Waibingen
And climbed that narrow stair.

And there he found awaiting him
A fortune and a wife.
They could not turn their back on him,
So he took them both for life.

Still faithful to her home and tasks
The wife sits in the tower;
Though men may come and men may go,
The clock still strikes the hour.

With a Gift of Flowers

The old, old earth had since its birth
Been always hard and bare,
Till one of the thoughts of God fell down
And flowers were everywhere.

With a Letter

I kissed the letter, dear, I sent.
I wonder if the letter knows!
My fingers trembled half afraid
They'd tell the story ere the close.

They did not tell it, did they, dear?
They knew I wanted to be good.
And yet the story is so sweet
I fear the kissed page understood.

The Winter Fleet

In banks of fog against the dawn of day
The ice-bound boats, gray ghosts of commerce, loom;
Shorn Samsons from the Great Lakes' broad highway,
By more than brazen fetters, locked in gloom.

Woman of the Mart

God made waxen fingers,
God made woman's heart;
Man it was made commerce,
Pushed her to the mart.

She can labor singing,
She can do her part;
Ever phantom fingers
Tug though at her heart.

Woman's World Conquest

On the hard rough fields,
Torn by trench and shot,
With his own red blood
In a hard browned clot,
Lay his mother's son.

The stars stared down
From the pitiless sky,
And he stared back
With glazing eye.

For hundreds of miles
He lay in his blood;
And no hand helped him
Out of the mud,
Out of the agony
Onto a cot—
Why, it seemed that
Even God forgot!

No field was won!
No good was done!
For hundreds of miles
In the dark he lay
And death was the only one
Came that way,
The only one

For this mother's son—
The thousands of him
That were seen by day,
Young and strong, and shot away
From on this earth,
That had need of him,
Young and strong,
And for generations
Will cry the wrong
Of killing him there—
For that upturned stare,
For that hard browned blood—
And it did no good,
His death—to any,
It did no good!

Oh, when will it be
For his mother's son
That these ghastly deeds
Can not be done?
That the young and strong
Be not forced to die,
And the old and weak
To hunger and cry,
When will it be
For the mother's son?

It will be when the last
Great field is won,
And the mothers who bore them
Shall call for peace,
Shall demand that murder
By nations cease—
Shall get the vision,
That mothers have done,
Of a babe that lay
On His mother's breast,
And brought our old earth
Peace and rest,
Till He rules mankind,
That mother's Son!

The Woolly Lamb

Just a woolly lamb, my child,
Broken at your play.
Come and lift your face to mine.
Tears, you go away.

Just a little woolly lamb
Gotten at the store;
No one meant to step on it,
We can get you more.

If they're not the very same,
It was but a toy.
Who was once so big and brave?
Where's our soldier boy?

When we grown folks break our lambs
We can make no noise,
We must close our lips and be
Sturdy soldier boys.

The Word Absolute

Beyond the reach of human hands lies justice;
Beyond the trick of human mouths lies truth:
And in the wilderness of nations' annals
As Sinii thunders, man must list forsooth.

The Word Was God

In the deep of Northland winter
The winds are dry and keen,
And great stars blaze in deep blue cold
O'er pines that wait in green
And lisp a word from the depths of their heart
Of the things not known or seen.

The nature folk dread no morrow,
The word is the law they know:
So, sure to the running water
The deer fleet-footed go;
And the trembling, snow-turned rabbits
Leap where the dried stalks blow.

The muskrat, Egypt's builder,
Makes her pyramid arise;
And last year's nest of eagles
On dead pines sweep the skies;
And the little birds carol abroad the word,
That all in nature lies.

The Working Woman

There was no home in the wide world for me.
A tender girl, I stood with wide-oped eyes
And heart that quite misgave me, as I asked
Where was my shelter. Then I did not know—
I was too young—although I half suspected,
Felt with woman's instinct what I later knew,
There was no home in the wide world for me.

The age I lived in was an age of gold,
An age of commerce and prosperity,
An age that drove her women to the marts,
Shutting the door of home upon them,
And forced them with the lash to slavish toil
If they would keep their virgin innocence.

And so I went and toiled and slaved with others.
But at first my woman's heart cried out for home,
Nor would for long be stilled, but oft cried out
For its great primal instincts, babes and home.
But being long denied, to save itself,
It ceased at last to kick against the pricks,
But looked about for woman's tasks to do.
And there it found them: tired hearts to soothe;
The broken, bind; the young ones to sustain;
To all hearts ever to be gentle, kind.
And last my heart had peace, although an instinct
cried,
A weak, sick voice from night-times unto me,
"Daughter, in all the world, thou hast no home."

The Wreck of the Benjamin Noble

Deep in the night the pines were waked,
The sentinels on the shore,
That watched while the gale its fury spent,
The lights of the cities and lighthouses went,
And no man said to the waves, "No more!"
The pines waked hushed in the deathlike black
And the old fell on their face,
For the time had come for sons of men,
And trees must watch in their place.
A frightened whisper, a sob, a sigh,
A groan like a man in pain;
They lifted their faces to the sky,
They reached in the dark and rain.
But the clouds hung pall-thick over the pines,
And trees may not stir in their place,
But only sob aloud in the night
When men perish before their face;
When their souls go out from the mad, black waves,
Go past on the groaning wind.
Their groaning souls on the groaning wind,
With the lightning flashes mixed mad blind,
The souls and the flash and the groan of them both,
To part with the earth and its clouds so loath;
While the great pines tossed and sobbed aloud
To see such things as the blackness showed.
But they had to stand in their place.

And no man knew where the boat went down
On our great unsalted sea;
And no one wept but a woman in town
Who stirred in her sleep as she saw him drown,
Miles from the place where he
Cried aloud to God and to her,
Till in her sleep it made her stir,
His cry from eternity.

But nobody knew, the people said,
And nobody wept the ore-boat's dead
As they died in that awful lake.

But men were mistaken, for high on the shore
The sentinel pines were awake,
And they moaned aloud to Nature's God,
And they moan forevermore!

Some Flowers from the Gardens of the Minnesingers

The following are a few of the famous lyrics of the Middle Ages. The author has attempted to be as liberal as possible in her translation. Of those by Walther von der Vogelweide one is chosen as illustrating the quaint conceits worked in rhyme schemes, and one as showing the desire to go on Crusades, both of which tendencies are characteristic of the times.

Four Anonymous Poems

Methinks there is naught so lovely, so with praise
replete,
As the dainty rosebud, and the true love of my sweet.
The merry little birds
They're singing in the woodland. To many a heart
that's dear.
But if my lover comes not, I shall have no summer-
glories here.

Let us tread the dances
Now, sweetheart mine;
Greet with happy glances
May whose mornings shine.
The winter caused the heather
Long worrying dread;
But he is departed.
He's held by merry-hearted
Blossoms, white and red.

In gladsome colors stands the wold,
The songs of birds resounding.
The beauties are growing manifold.
May crowns with joy abounding

Longing affection. Who'd be old
When spring is all adorning?
Sweet Maytime, you the breezes hold.
The winter we are scorning.

From a Love Letter

Thou art mine, I am thine,
Thus always shalt thou be,
For thou art fastened
Within my bosom,
Lost is the little key,
So in there thou must ever be.

Two Poems by Dietmar von Aist

Ah, now there comes to us the time
When all the little birdlings sing.
The linden broad is growing green,
The winter long is vanishing.
And flowers fair to look upon
We see upon the heather shine.
It makes the hearts of many glad:
And just these things can comfort mine.

There stood a maiden lonely
And waited on the heather
And waited for her lover.
She saw the birds fly over:
"I greet thee, falcon, that thou art!
Thou flyest where it please thy heart:
And thou choosest in the woodland
The tree which seemeth goodly.
And also I have done like thee:
A loved one I have chosen me;
The one my eyes have taken,
Why should it rancor waken?
The fair maids envy me this one,
And I have envied them the lover true of none.

A Song of the Mystics

(Johannes Tauler, 1300)

There comes a ship well laden
Up to the highest wale,
It brings the Son of the Father,
Eternal Word. All hail!

The little ship is gliding
All still the waves atween,
It brings us a gift most precious,
The blessed, gracious Queen.

O, Mary, thou rose exalted,
A branch of all that's blest,
Thou beautiful narcissus,
Free us with sin oppressed.

The ship that goes so calmly
And bears such precious last,
The sail is Love incarnate,
The Holy Ghost, the mast.

Four Poems by Walther von der Vogelweide**The Reed-Measuring**

With doubting and despondent heart
I sat for long and gravely pondered
How from her service I would part
But comfort came before I wandered.
It scarcely may be called a comfort, woe, say I,
'Tis but the littlest comfort, I'll agree,
So little that if I should tell it, you'd laugh at me.
Yet none's e'er made happy, and knows not why.
It was a grass brought joy, indeed,
It said she'd favor me in suing.
I measured on a little reed
As I had seen the children doing.
Now hearken and notice if she loves me true:
"She does, she does not, she does, she does not, she
does."
As oft as I did it, always was the end, she loves.
That comforts me: it takes faith to believe it too.

Surfeit of Winter

The world was golden, red and gay,
Green in the forest and country way;
The little birdies sang all the day.
But now the cawing crows inveigh.
She now wears other colors? Yea:
She's grown all pale and dismal gray.
And frowns on many foreheads stay.

I sat upon a hillside free,
And flowers and clover sprang round me
To shut me from the smiling sea.
But now the view is lost, where we
Picked the blossoms, I and she;
Now frost and snow lie on the lea,
It makes the birdlings sad I see.

The simple wail, "O, dear! O, my!"
The poor, "Alas! Alack!" they cry.
A weight like lead my spirits lie
I have of cares so great supply.
But be they e'er so many, I
Know all at once away they'd fly
If but the summer-time drew nigh.

Before I long existed so
I'd eat my crawfish raw, I know.
Summer, cheer us, be not slow;
You make the mead and woodland blow.
Then to pick the flowers I'll go,
In the sun my heart will glow
That the winter hunted low.

Like Esau I have lost my due:
My hair so soft has grown askew.
Lovely summer, where are you?
I'd like to have ploughed fields in view.
Before I'd be shut up anew
In such a trap, as now I rue,
I would be a monk at Dobrilu.

Morning Prayer

With blessings would I arise for to-day,
Jehovah, in thy protection stay
As I ride or go, in what land I tarry.
Christ, master, make it shown to me,
Thy wondrous power of sanctity,
And for thy mother' sake my welfare carry.
As o'er thee watched the angels holy
And thine, when thou in the crib so lowly,
Young as man and old as God,
Laidst 'mong the donkeys and the cattle in the
stable
(And yet with wondrous blessed guiding,
Gabriel, the good, abiding
Full of love and by thee awed),
So care for mine I love, as thou art able,
For them I ask Thy grace, O, Lord.

Then and Now

Ah me! how find I vanished all my years from
view!
Can I have dreamed my life were thus, can it be
it's true?
Or have I ever fancied something that was not?
And so I have been sleeping having quite forgot.
Now I have been wakened, the things are strange
I see,
That used to be familiar, as my own hand to me.
People and places where I from childhood have
been living
Have grown so unaccustomed, it seems the lie
they're living.
And those who were my playmates, have grown
subdued and old.
Ploughed farther is the field, hewn down is the
wold:
If e'en the water's flowing on, as it used to flow,
Indeed it seems to me, that my misfortunes grow.

Many hesitate to greet me, who formerly knew
me well.

The world is filled with troubles more than I can
tell.

I can but think how many a day wondrous glad
and free,

Now is wholly lost to me as ripples in the sea,
Ever more, ah me!

Ah me! how very doleful all the young folks go!
Whose faces lit with pleasure once were shining so,
They now know naught but sorrow: why do they
so, ah me?

Where'er I turn there's no one in the world knows
glee;

Dancing, aye and singing are wholly changed to
grief:

No Christian ever saw such years and no relief.
Now, notice too the women's garlands in such
plight;

The haughty knights are dressing as a peasant
might.

We get unpleasant letters late from Rome directed,
Our joys are all forbidden and all our woes pro-
tected.

It hurts my very spirit (we lived in happy years),
That I in place of laughter ought to choose for
tears.

And we complain so much the little birds deplore it:
What wonder is it I am gravely doubting o'er it?
And what do I, foolish man, o'erwrought by anger
say?

Who follows this sweet wonder, he has that one
lost for aye.

Ever more, ah me!

Ah me! we cloy of sweets so soon 'tis worth our
noting.

I can see the gall so bitter within the honey
floating:

The world is outward lovely, green and red and
white,

And inward sable colored, dark as death and
night.

And when the world's deceiving, denying him its
cheer:

He can with easy penance from mighty sins get
clear.

'Tis an affair, brave knight, that you should
gladly hail:

For you wear shining helmet, and heavy coat of
mail,

The best and firmest buckler, and consecrated
blade.

Would to God that I but worthy such were made!
So would I, needy man, deserve a rich reward.

I do not mean the feudal gifts, neither gold of
lord:

I'd wear a crown of glory ever and forever:

And this a common soldier might win with his
endeavor.

Might I but make the journey so blest across the
sea,

Then would I forever sing "All's well" and never
more, "Ah me!"

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